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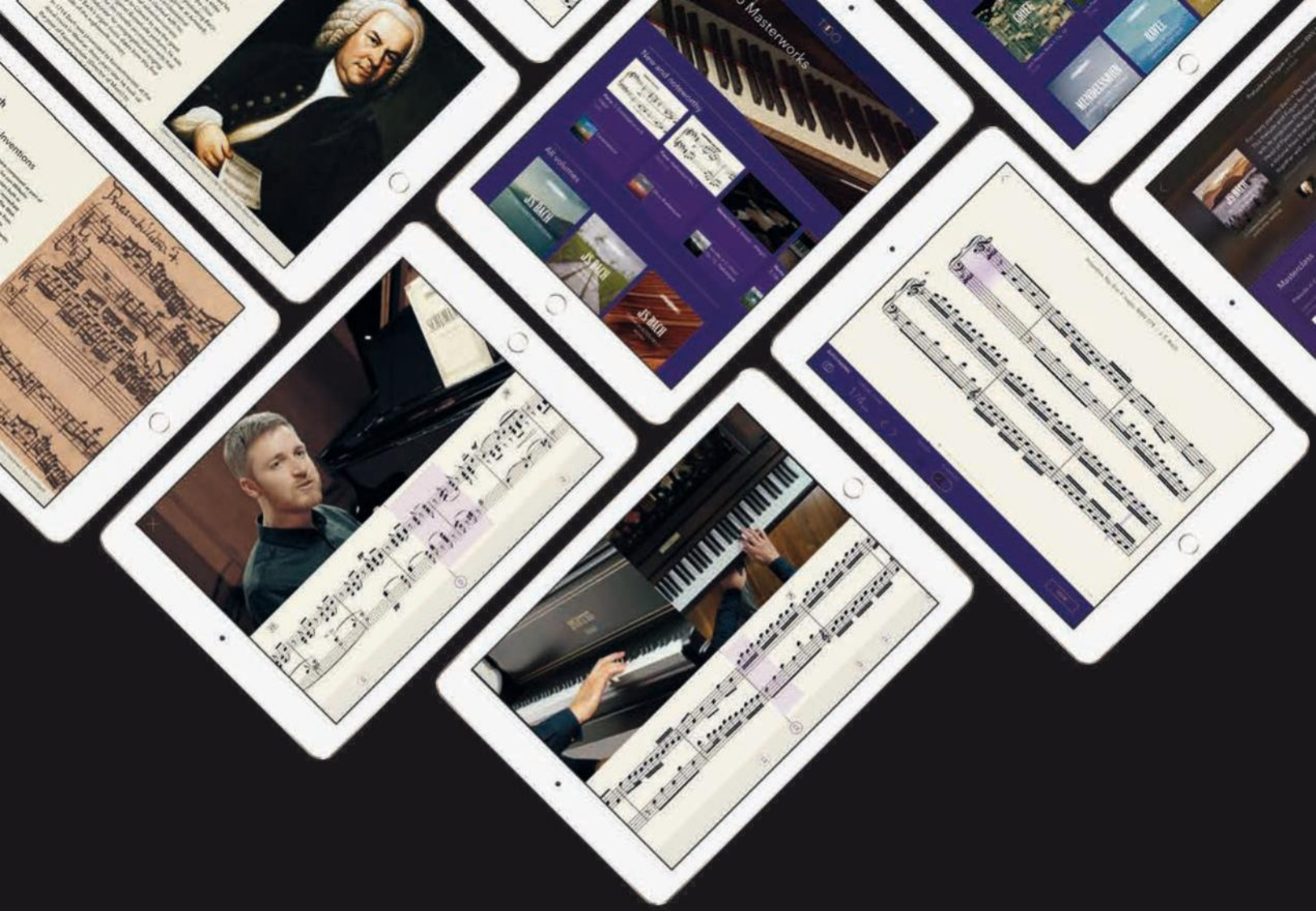
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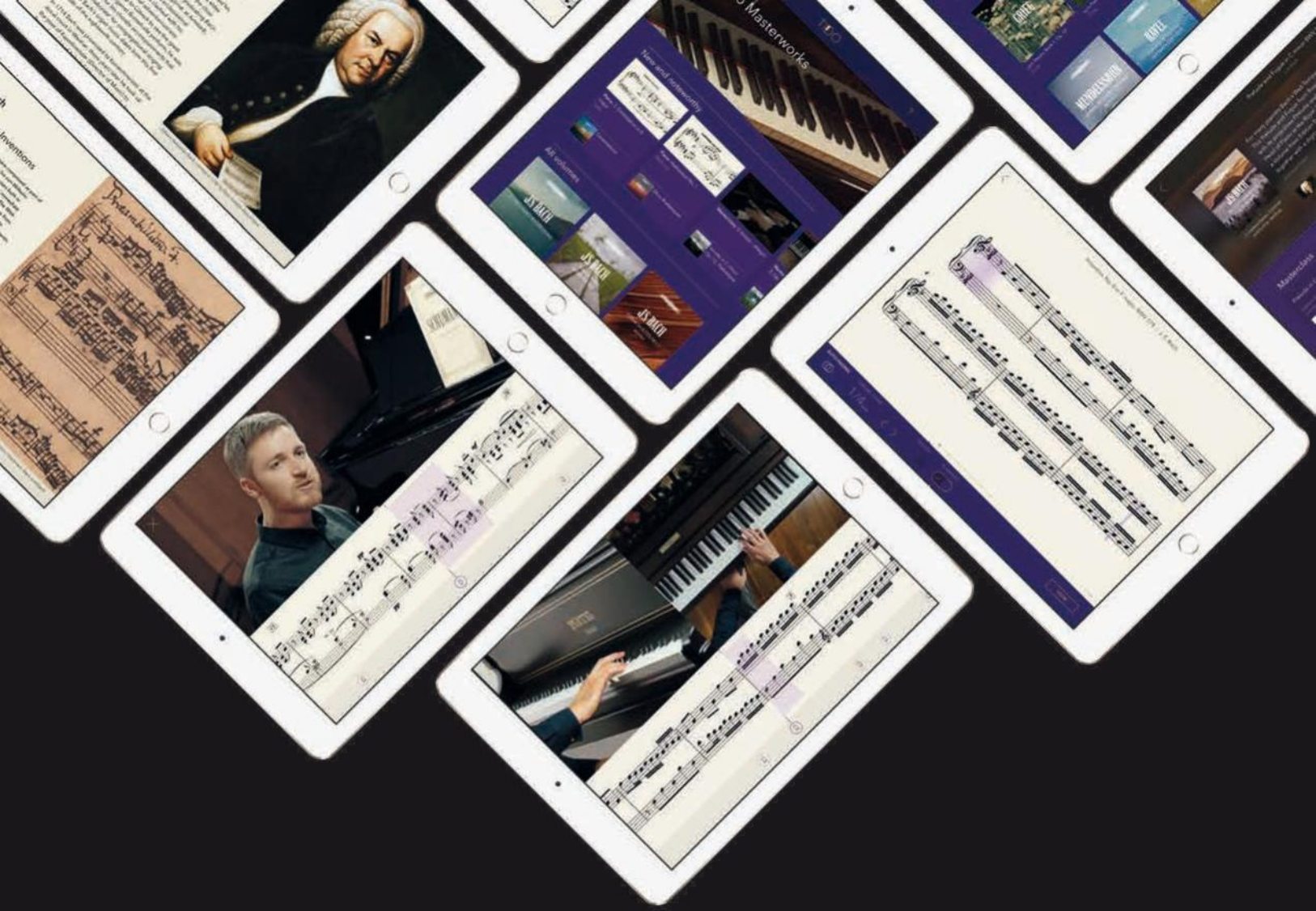
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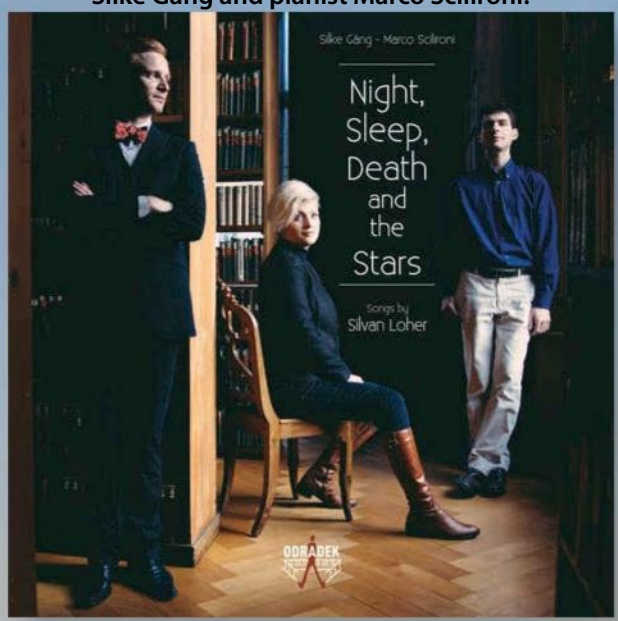
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Hailed as "Simply one of the best interpreters of Beethoven in the world", Muriel Chemin performs Beethoven's miraculous Diabelli Variations on this unmissable new disc from Odradek.



Beethoven's Diabelli Variations represent one of the greatest works for solo piano ever written. Throughout this monumental work, Beethoven dazzles us with his ability to transform Diabelli's theme, exploring a breathtaking variety of musical pathways. For award-winning pianist Muriel Chemin, these variations have become an integral part of her repertoire, and she is regularly acknowledged as one of the most convincing and original interpreters of Beethoven in the world.

Odradek presents Swiss composer Silvan Loher's settings of Mascha Kaléko and Walt Whitman, performed by mezzo soprano Silke Gäng and pianist Marco Scilironi.



Silvan Loher has chosen poems by Kaléko which conjure up the smoky cabaret era of Berlin in the 1930s, and his music reflects this atmosphere perfectly. Themes of introspection and unease, set to dark-hued, richly evocative music, are balanced with moments of wistful nostalgia, when Loher's love of Grieg and Brahms becomes audible. In contrast, Whitman's famously direct and brilliant poetry draws from Loher music as wide-ranging as the texts themselves, reflecting a wealth of emotions from longing, to agitation, to loneliness, to the rapturous celebration of nature.

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B Childs

37 Songs[a]. Any Five[b]. Heaven to clear when day did close...[a]. Music for Bass Drum[c]. Music for Contrabass and Friend[d]. Real Music[e]. Sonata for Solo Clarinet[f]. Stances for Flute and Silence[g]
[bg]**Nancy Turetzky** *fl* [bdef]**Phillip Rehfeldt,**
[e]**Scott Vance** *cls* [bd]**Bertram Turetzky** *db*
[ab]**David Ward-Steinman** *pf* [bc]**Ron George,**
[c]**Chris Corman,** [c]**Blake Van Vliet** *perc*
New World Ⓕ NW80779-2 (55' • DDD)



There is cool in American maverick music like Lou Harrison, who couldn't resist the mainstream, and then there is cool like Barney Childs, who thought there wasn't any such thing. Childs's ability to fashion sounds that would interact with instruments and performers, while at the same accommodating and transcending his own shifting compositional techniques and capturing something of himself in the process, spans the 30 years of music on this new CD. The recordings, made in 2001 and only now being released, were meant as a tribute to Childs by close friends who were musicians and composers themselves, like clarinetist Phillip Rehfeldt, a student of the great Kalman Bloch, and maverick double bassist Bertram Turetzky.

While each recording is by definition authoritative, Bert's wife Nancy Turetzky in *Stances for Flute and Silence* stands out for capturing the rhapsodic soul of Childs's creations. The opportunity to hear seven minutes of Bertram himself, mostly solo, in *Music for Contrabass and Friend*, laced with inside jokes, is a reminder of halcyon days at the University of Redlands, where Childs taught for more than 20 years. The title-track, dedicated to John McCabe and inspired by Ben Jonson's *Hymn to Diana*, is played with a lovely range of tonal beauty by David Ward-Steinman.

In his booklet-notes, Stanford University Head Music Librarian Jerry L McBride lays out many of the whys and wherefores of Childs's compositional tools and techniques, and tries to reconcile his academic passion for poetical analysis with the composer's asking whether we can ever free ourselves from the need for such validation. **Laurence Vittes**

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Peter Jermihov

The guest conductor of Gloriæ Dei Cantores discusses Rachmaninov's All-Night Vigil



How does the liturgical context of Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* influence your interpretation?
A sense of the flow of the *All-Night Vigil* as a Divine Worship experience is essential to this music. While it is not intended specifically for performance in worship, the entire ethos of Orthodox music is rooted in this awareness. In performance every parameter in this music is influenced by one's sense of Orthodox worship, whether delivery of text, tone of the choir, character of the music, gestural phrasing or the intangible notion of 'spirituality'.

What are the challenges for a non-Russian choir in performing this music?
Just as Beethoven's music is universal, so is Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil*. Still, the performance challenges are considerable, despite the universal nature of the music it still originates in a particular culture, from which it is inseparable, and to assimilate that culture is no small thing.

You must have some pretty good basses.
Yes, indeed! We have a formidable bass section, with seven octavists who can each sing down to very low G (G1). However, the challenge is not simply to 'hit' the low notes but to 'land' on them with care and meaning. The final low B flat in the fifth movement, for example, is a transference to eternity and not merely a musical effect; it is very hard to shape a sound that is vocally difficult to produce. This is why a consummate musician like the octavist Glenn Miller, whom we were fortunate to have, is truly a wonder.

What are your future plans?
Gloriæ Dei Cantores, under Richard K Pugsley, are perfoming Ralph Vaughan Williams's rarely produced opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* this autumn at their home in Orleans, MA.

Joplin

'Complete Rags, Waltzes and Marches'
William Appling Singers and Orchestra
William Appling Singers and Orchestra Ⓕ
WASO2008-4 (3h 51' • DDD)



William Appling (1932-2008) was a highly respected teacher and superb choral director who influenced many lives. He discovered Scott Joplin's piano music as an adult and resolved to record it all, despite failing health (a surgical mishap generally prevented him from making use of the sustain pedal.). Appling ultimately set down everything except for Joplin's collaborative works with others, although he died before post-production work could take place. Several of Appling's close associates have readied these recordings for publication. In fact, seven selections have already appeared on a release pairing Joplin and JS Bach that I previously reviewed. Then, as now, I took issue with Appling's tense, short-breathed and sometimes clunky

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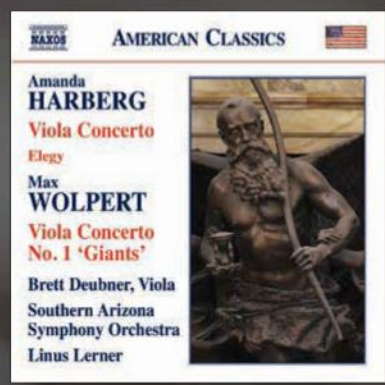
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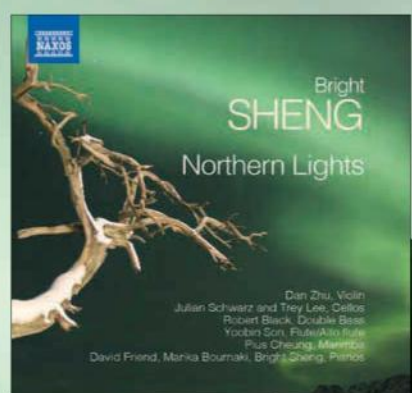
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'A composer of keen imagination and instincts', Bernhard Rands took four decades to bring his opera about Vincent van Gogh to fruition – see review on page V

phrasing, his overly slow tempos, his lack of sufficient dynamic contrast and his dry textures. These drawbacks, moreover, were (and still are) underlined by an aridly close-up, colourless recorded ambience.

That said, Appling brings a leisurely wistfulness to the waltzes that reveals genuine sensitivity and control (*Bethena*, for example), while certain rags stand out for the pianist's careful gradations in voicing and touch, as in *Euphonic Sounds*. Yet Joplin's trademark syncopated rhythms are often negotiated with a stiffness and rigidity that have nothing to do with tempo per se (*The Cascades* and *Maple Leaf Rag* are cases in point). Granted, you won't find the archness and self-awareness that sometimes comes across in Joshua Rifkin's interpretations (Nonesuch, 6/72). But neither is there the panache, the inner rhythm, the vitality, the effortless virtuosity and the pianistic finesse distinguishing Dick Hyman's mid-1970s Joplin cycle (RCA, 7/89). A lot of care and consideration went into the packaging, judging from the artwork, the extensive and somewhat provocative booklet-note by Patricia Oldham, and an essay that goes to great lengths defending the stylistic authenticity of Appling's approach. **Jed Distler**

Martinů

'Small Storms'
Seven Arabesques. H201. Ariette, H188*b*. Nocturnes, H189. Suite miniature, H192. Variations on a Slovakian Theme, H378. Variations on a Theme of Rossini, H290
Meredith Blecha-Wells *vc*
Sun Min Kim *pf*
Navona Ⓕ NV6092 (59' • DDD)



Martinů's three cello sonatas were preceded by a clutch of suites and movements written in Paris (mostly) in 1930-31. The largest of these, the six *Pastorals*, H190, is his longest for this combination but omitted from Navona's 'collection of short pieces by Bohuslav Martinů', replaced by the two vibrant sets of variations from 1942 (*Rossini*) and 1959 (*Slovak*), his most popular works for cello and piano.

This is the debut recording by Meredith Blecha-Wells, Associate Professor of Cello at Oklahoma State University. Hers is a beautifully full and lyrically strong tone, heard at its best in the *Lento*, the substantial second of the four *Nocturnes* (1931), and in the outer sections of the brief *Ariette* of the same year. The latter's central section is in Martinů's trademark 'jazz' style of the 1920s. Blecha-Wells is equally adept at faster, more vigorous music, as evident in the *Seven Arabesques* (1930), the subtitle of which – *Études rhythmiques* – gives the clue to their character. Listen to the *Allegretto* sixth, with its hints of Spanish dance.

There are other versions available of all these works but not gathered together on one disc (a couple of collections, not listed below, include the *Pastorals* but leave out something else). The programme as a whole is a delight, the bar set by the *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* which Blecha-Wells, immaculately supported (as throughout) by Sun Min Kim, milks for all its humorous potential. Theirs is a match for any of the accounts listed below and in any of these works they need fear little by comparison. Splendid, vivid sound from Navona, too. Recommended.
Guy Rickards

Rossini Variations, Slovak Variations – selected comparison:
P & H Watkins (8/10) (CHAN) CHAN10602
Rossini Variations – selected comparison:
Jamník, Kahánek (SUPR) SU3928-2
Slovak Variations – selected comparisons:
Blaumane, Katsnelson (A/08) (QUAR) QTZ2057
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Rachmaninov

All-Night Vigil (Vespers), Op 37
Mariya Berezovska *contr* **Dmitry Ivanchenko** *ten*
Gloriæ Dei Cantores / Peter Jermihov
Paraclete Ⓕ GDCD063 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Since Gloriæ Dei Cantores are one of North America's finest non-professional choirs with at least 50 CDs to their credit, it was just a matter of time before they committed Rachmaninov's sublime *All-Night Vigil* to disc. Conductor Peter Jermihov's booklet-notes rightly point out how one cannot separate the pursuit of musical excellence from this work's liturgical context. Tempos, for example, should be governed by the natural flow of the hymns on which the movements are based, while Rachmaninov's relatively sparse indications of pulse are essentially precautionary guides for the conductor. Furthermore, Jermihov's recording incorporates introductory introits by the Priest and Deacon that are usually omitted for recording purposes.

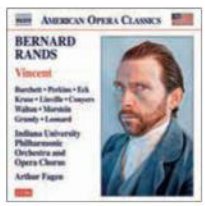
In the main, Jermihov aims for clearly delineated polyphony and transparent textures. Note, for example, the vividly characterised contrasts in articulation and sonority throughout 'Praise the Name of the Lord', or the sustained delicacy and dead-on intonation in The Lesser Doxology's final pages. The Great Doxology's concluding section is a revealing example of how to generate tension, excitement and forward momentum through understatement. Mariya Berezovska's wobbly alto solo neither helps nor hurts in the second movement but the ardent lyricism of tenor Dmitry Ivanchenko's solo contributions is decidedly a positive asset.

To be certain, the interpretation yields to the extraordinary heft and luminosity that Charles Bruffy achieves with his combined Phoenix and Kansas City choirs, as well as the resonant impact of Chandos's multichannel sound, even if some listeners might prefer Jermihov's less protracted, more conventional tempos. Still and all, Jermihov's idiomatic vision offers much to savour. This release comes with a useful, beautifully illustrated booklet containing full texts and translations, prefaced by information pertaining to the origin of each hymn. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparison:
Phoenix Chorale, Kansas City Chorale, Bruffy (5/15) (CHAN) CHSA5148

Rands

Vincent
Christopher Burchett *bar* ..... Vincent van Gogh
Will Perkins *ten* ..... Theo van Gogh
Jason Egk *bass-bar* ..... Theodorus van Gogh
Kelly Kruse *sop* ..... Sien
Steven Linville *ten* ..... Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Laura Conyers *mez* ..... Agostina Segatori
Adam Walton *bass-bar* ..... Paul Gauguin
Andrew Morstein *ten* ..... Dr Peyron
Christopher Grundy *bar* ..... Dr Paul Gachet
Jami Leonard *sop* ..... Marguerite Gachet
Indiana University Philharmonic Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Arthur Fagen
Naxos American Opera Classics Ⓜ ② 8 669037/8 (119' • DDD). Recorded live at Indiana University, April 9 & 15, 2011. Includes synopsis; text available from **naxos.com/libretti/669037.htm**



Bernard Rands may be one of the most patient operatic composers of all time. From initial idea to first production, *Vincent*, his opera about Vincent van Gogh, unfolded over a period of four decades, finally reaching its world premiere in 2011 as part of the Indiana University Department of Music's 100th anniversary. The Indiana forces can be heard on this fine recording, captured live during the two inaugural performances.

Rands, a composer of keen imagination and instincts, reveals another side of his multihued creativity in *Vincent*, which depicts numerous challenging moments in the artist's life and career, including his many rejections, aborted relationships and descent into self-mutilation and death. Set to a taut libretto by JD McClatchy, the opera teems with colourful incident, both in intimate and grand theatrical terms.

As ever, Rands finds novel ways to go under his subject's skin. Some of the music will be familiar to listeners who have heard *Le tambourin*, his two suites based on Van Gogh paintings that received their premieres in 1984 – and subsequent recording on New World Records – by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Riccardo Muti. If *Vincent* is more powerful in orchestral than vocal terms, the angst and occasional joys that Van Gogh experienced are captured in a series of vivid, eloquent episodes.

Baritone Christopher Burchett makes a potent Vincent and tenor Will Perkins is warmly sympathetic as his brother, Theo. The Indiana performance, conducted by Arthur Fagen, brims with telling detail and vibrancy. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Black Mountain Songs'

Bischoff Childhood's Retreat **Dessner** Black Mountain Song. Maximus to Gloucester. My World **Hecker/ Dessner** MC Richards **J King** ars imitatur naturam **Muhly** Fielding Dowson in Franz Kline's Studio **RR Parry** Spaceship Earth. Their Passing in Time. there is a sound **C Shaw** Anni's Constant. Its Motion Keeps **Vrebalov** Bubbles
Brooklyn Youth Chorus / Dianne Berkun Menaker
New Amsterdam Ⓕ NWAM087 (77' • DDD • T/t)



The Brooklyn Youth Chorus introduced 'Black Mountain Songs' during the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in 2014. Along with the ensemble's 50 singers, the staged production included dancers, videos and readings, all revolving around song settings by eight composers. The visual impact can't be gleaned from this recording of the work's 13 songs, but what is there reflects a deep commitment on the part of the chorus, the Academy and the composers to create a diverse, moving and jubilant experience.

As a boy, the composer-guitarist Bryce Dessner spent a summer at a North Carolina camp near Black Mountain College, whose curriculum was rooted in the arts, and which closed in 1957. He conceived *Black Mountain Song* as a tribute to the college's collaborative aesthetic, which is reflected in the array of styles, techniques and texts that make up this captivating song-cycle.

Dessner and Richard Reed Parry are represented by three songs apiece and Caroline Shaw with two; the other composers are John King, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Jherek Bischoff, Nico Muhly and Tim Hecker. In tailoring their creations for the Brooklyn chorus, the composers didn't stint on challenges. The young choristers, under founder and artistic director Dianne Berkun Menaker, rise to every occasion with singing pure in pitch and alert to the lyrical or pungent activity.

Among the delights are Vrebalov's *Bubbles*, in which the ensemble bursts with nimble glee, and Shaw's shimmering *Its Motion Keeps*. But the entire cycle beguiles, as does the artistry of this exceptional ensemble.
Donald Rosenberg



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On their latest album 'Unbound', the Jasper Quartet play seven modern works where 'wonderful moments and dramatic tours de force abound'

'Thrive on Routine'

JL Adams In a treeles place, only snow **Andres** Thrive on Routine **Burhans** Jahrzeit **C Shaw** Gustave Le Gray. in manus tuas **Timo Andres** *pf*
American Contemporary Music Ensemble
Sono Luminus Ⓜ ② (CD + ⇆) DSL92211 (60' • DDD • DTS-HD MA5.1, 9.1 Auro-3D 192kHz/24-bit & LPCM stereo)



The newest recording from ACME (American Contemporary Music Ensemble) contains a bounty of appealing recent works. Four are by ensemble members Timo Andres, Caleb Burhans and Caroline Shaw, while the fifth, and most expansive, is John Luther Adams's *In a treeless place, only snow*.

Each of the pieces by ACME players has a back story. Andres's *Thrive on Routine* is inspired by Ives's morning rituals and love of Bach. The movement titles – 'Morning', 'Potatoes', 'Passcaglia', 'Coda' – tell much of the tale, with inestimable help from Andres's witty and concise musings for string quartet. Another quartet, Burhans's *Jahrzeit* pays tribute to the composer's late father in music of haunting radiance and poignancy.

Shaw's two entries are solo works that reflect on music of past masters in deft modern strokes. *in manus tuas* is a glowing evocation of a Tallis motet in which the cello, emerging from a haze, spins wisps of phrases that fade into space; Clarice Jensen gives it an impassioned performance. In *Gustave Le Gray*, Chopin's A minor Mazurka, Op 17 No 4, is transformed into a new, moving context, especially in the sensitive account by pianist Andres.

As in many scores, Adams emits a quiet cry on behalf of ecological sanity in his glistening piece for string quartet, piano, celesta and vibraphones. The ACME players capture the aura of tranquility to hypnotic effect, the repeated patterns in the keyboard instruments contrasted beautifully with the lyrical strings. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Unbound'

Dennehy Pushpulling **Gosfield** The Blue Horse Walks on the Horizon **Greenstein** Four on the Floor **Hearne** Law of Mosaics – Excerpts from the middle of something **D Lang** almost all the time **Mazzoli** Death Valley Junction **C Shaw** Valencia
Jasper Quartet
Sono Luminus Ⓕ DSL92212 (69' • DDD)



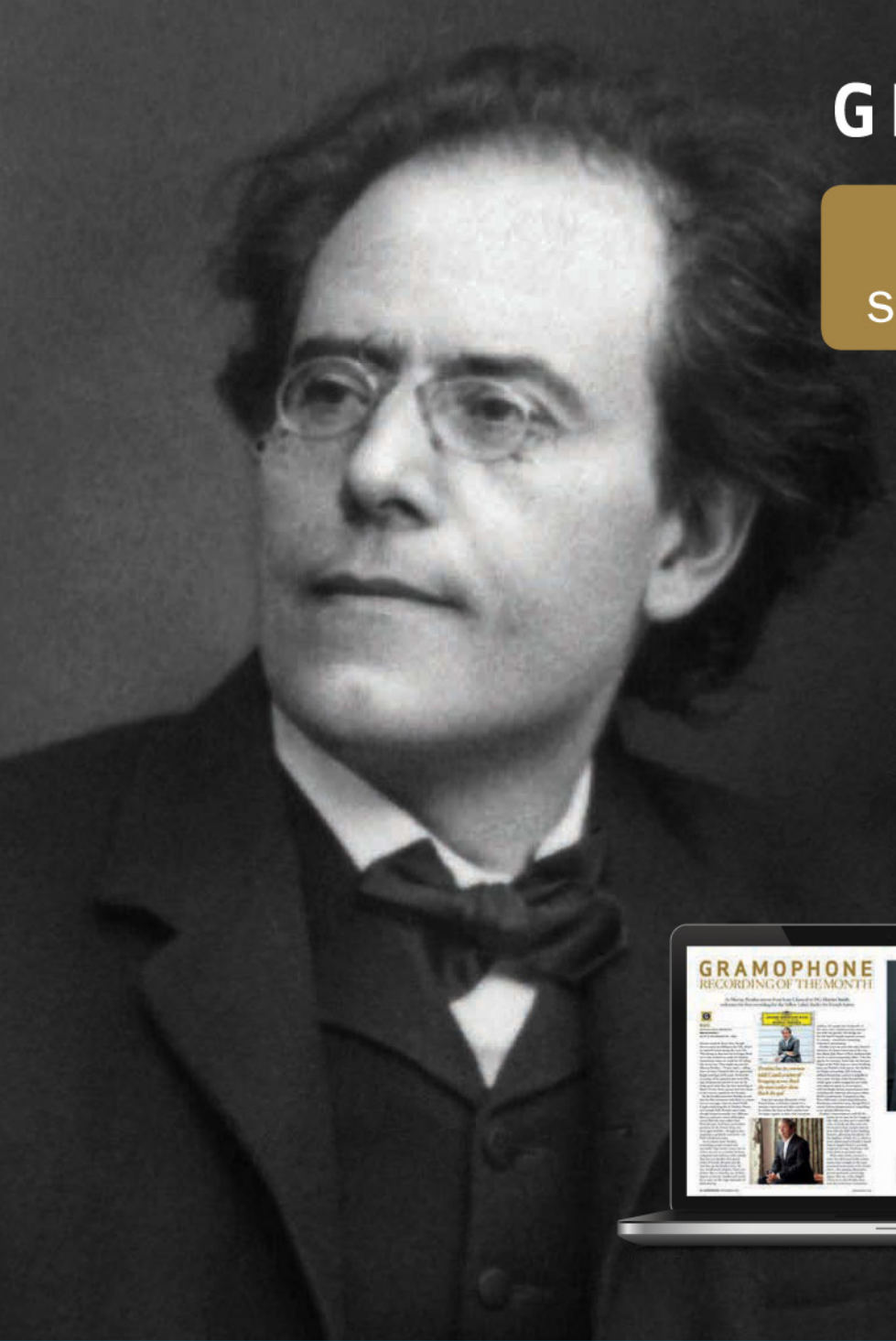
The Jasper Quartet select seven pieces written since 2005 for their third Sono Luminus CD. Five begin with a pulse that sets the music's course; two move in irregular fits and starts. And despite lengths varying from four to 18 minutes, each has a personal core.

Annie Gosfield's *The Blue Horse Walks on the Horizon* was written for the Jaspers. Inspired by the surreal radio broadcasts and codes used by European resistance groups in the Second World War, Gosfield's complex 16-minute narrative opens like the *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando* in Beethoven's first 'Rasumovsky' Quartet, then moves into territory as wild as a string quartet can get without actually tearing its strings out.

Wonderful moments and dramatic tours de force abound, whether suggestive string glissandos tracing sensuous curves in Caroline Shaw's *Valencia* or the luxurious cello solo in Missy Mazzoli's *Death Valley Junction*. Judd Greenstein's finely judged *Four on the Floor* is consumed in frantic motor energy before breaking out into a superb Bartókian jog-trot and climax. The disjointed 18-minute skein of sound that David Lang's *almost all the time* creates is a response to the question 'can a piece begin as identical microscopic cells that then differentiate into other functions across time?' Donnacha Dennehy's *Pushpulling*, an exercise in increasingly ominous, skittling anxiety, is the only moderately disturbing music on the CD. The collection closes with Ted Hearne's *Excerpts from the middle of something*, an intoxicating romp that is interrupted throughout like Haydn at the end of his *Joke* Quartet. **Laurence Vittes**

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Borders, space and the sound of silence

This issue's cover story explores the borders existing between genres, but in My Music, landscape architect Kim Wilkie reflects on sound borders in an even wider sense. There's usually a timely 'peg' as to who we interview in My Music each month. In Wilkie's case he has been restoring the Arcadian landscape around The Grange, a neoclassical house in Hampshire and now home to the Grange Festival. But invariably these sorts of conversations range far and fascinatingly beyond any such starting point, and that was certainly the case here.

Throughout our interview, Wilkie conveyed a deep awareness of the sound around him, whether the music of the jungle surrounding his childhood home, or the clean, crisp sound of the desert around another. Or the counterpoise of silence and music – in his eloquent phrase – familiar to any who have spent time in Oxbridge and stepped from Evensong at dusk into the unique stillness of a college court. At The Grange, he wants people to leave the opera and be surrounded by the midsummer ambience of nature: again, that counterpoise between music and silence. Those of us who have found ourselves walking straight from a profound performance at, say, ENO, and into the acoustic chaos of a city street will appreciate the point.

It is for this reason that many musicians will retreat to remote studios to record – not something unique to classical music either, but a habit of rock and pop musicians too. I use 'retreat' here not so much to mean an escape *from* something, but rather in the sense of the religious retreat: an escape *to* something. Some years ago I wrote about a scheme offered by



Aldeburgh Productions to offer artists space among the space, within the Suffolk silence, to simply explore new repertoire, or to develop projects in a focused environment, and without needing to 'clock-watch' because they were due imminently to teach someone, or rehearse somewhere else.

But of course when we talk of space and silence in relation to the countryside, we're simply loading those terms with a meaning defined entirely in relation to the urban experience. For what is space, what is silence? That's a question John Cage famously posed of course. Another My Music interviewee, the architect Daniel Libeskind, talked some years back about the great importance of how a building sounds to him. A few months ago, the founder of Lush, Mark Constantine encouraged *Gramophone* readers to expand their listening with the music of birdsong. Perhaps that's why My Music interviews are frequently among the most enjoyable to conduct. As so often, talking to someone from outside our immediate world can nudge our gaze towards a fresh perspective.

Going back to Kim Wilkie, he also made the point that as he gets older silence is more precious, that he avoids music as background, that it's something you turn on deliberately. I concur completely. Paintings are more effective when hung sparingly on spacious walls. Tall buildings are more dramatic when alone on a skyline and not clustered in each other's shadows. Mountains appear more formidable when looming alone from a plain, not jutting from a range. And music is more powerful when surrounded by silence.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'The porous boundaries of classical music today: what a gargantuan thicket of a subject!' says **KATE MOLLESON** on writing her cover story. 'But the more I thought about it, the more I felt this is the conversation of our times, to do with celebrating open borders and not losing sight of our traditions.'



'Hearing the Czech Philharmonic perform Dvořák's *Stabat mater* in Prague was very special,' writes **NEIL FISHER**, author of our feature on the orchestra. 'Music pours from every pore of the city, but at Easter both churches and concert halls turn to Dvořák's setting of this mysterious medieval hymn.'



'Surely nothing will have you bouncing off the walls like listening to multiple performances of *Belshazzar's Feast* in one sitting', says **ANDREW MELLOR**, writer of this month's Collection. 'The invention and wicked excitement Walton displays in this piece never dims.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK KEAN, KAAPO KAMU, SISI BURN/ARENAPAL

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8.503293

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© Emily Chu

Klaus Heymann

THE ANNIVERSARY PLAYLIST



To listen to a playlist of 30 Gramophone Editor's Choices chosen by James Jolly, please visit the Naxos Curator profile on Apple Music.

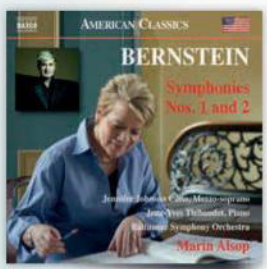
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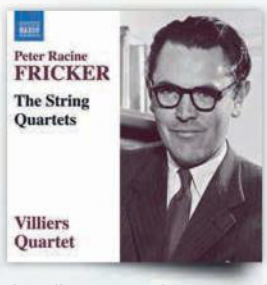
8.573666

"Giltburg has all the agility, power and expressive intensity Shostakovich's piano concertos demand… And he has found like-minded partners in the RLPO and Petrenko"
Gramophone



8.559790

"The performances are predictably excellent… Yves Thibaudet negotiates the two opening chains of variations with wide-ranging characterisation"
BBC Music Magazine



8.571374

"The Villiers Quartet have captured the current mood of edgy, querulous uncertainty with their release of the three magnificently bracing string quartets of Fricker...
The playing is superb throughout."
The Observer



8.573501

"Krassimira Stoyanova is one absolutely brilliant, technically flawless performer of these songs. […]. Highly recommended!"
Pizzicato

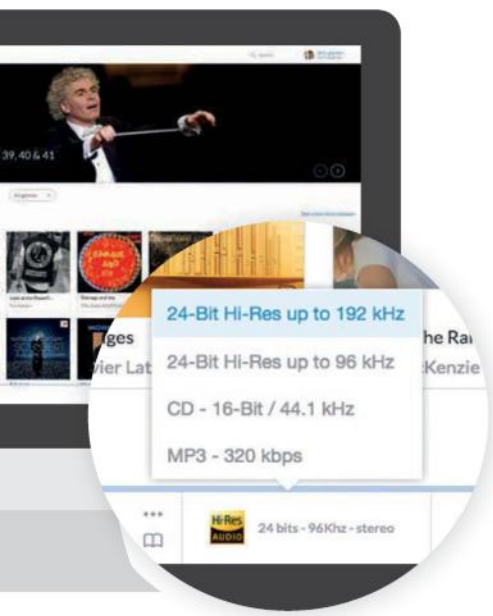
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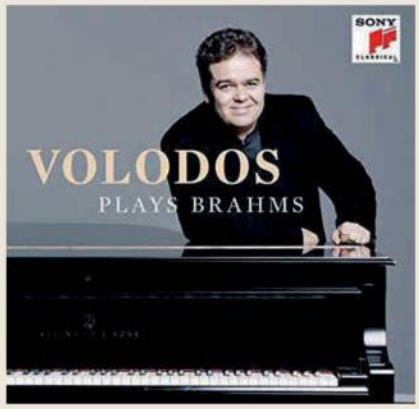
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BRAHMS
Piano Pieces, Op 76, 117 & 118
Arcadi Volodos *pf*
Sony Classical
▶ HARRIET SMITH'S REVIEW IS ON **PAGE 26**

One is struck first by the extraordinary sound Arcadi Volodos draws from his piano; this is swiftly followed by wonder at the warmth, individuality and beauty of his performance.



ANTHEIL
Orchestral Works, Vol 1
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds
Chandos
This was new music to me, but performed with such expression and advocacy that I'm delighted to have heard it, and am left eagerly awaiting Volume 2!
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 28



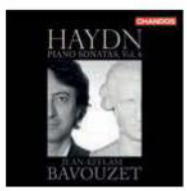
MAHLER
Symphony No 3
Gerhild Romberger *mez*
Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer
Channel Classics
Iván Fischer's Mahler journey has been a powerful one; he now adds the Third, explored and performed with devotion from players and label alike.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 37



RAVEL Daphnis et Chloé
Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth
Harmonia Mundi
Reviews of François-Xavier Roth's regularly praised recordings in our pages all hint at one thing: there's never anything routine about his approach, the sound or the vision.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 40



BRAHMS String Sextets
Renaud Capuçon et al
Erato
A very stylish sextet indeed – the Capuçons and colleagues, here caught live, convey the individuality of playing but unanimity of vision which defines chamber music at its most engaging and its best.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 49



HAYDN
Piano Sonatas, Vol 6
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*
Chandos
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet continues his Haydn survey as wonderfully as any follower of the series might hope and expect: probing curiosity, technical finesse and love of music-making shine forth throughout.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 61



LISZT/TAUSIG
Eine Faust-Symphonie
István Lajkó *pf*
Hungaroton
My second new discovery this month, and for this I can be forgiven: a remarkable transcription of Liszt's mighty *Faust Symphony*, played with astonishing confidence and skill by István Lajkó.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 62



JS BACH Cantatas Nos 54 & 170 **PERGOLESI**
Stabat mater
Lucy Crowe *sop* **Tim Mead** *counterten* **La Nuova Musica / David Bates**
Harmonia Mundi
The first of two *Stabat maters* this month (following, indeed, James MacMillan's new setting last issue), and very moving it is too.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 72



SKEMPTON The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group / Martyn Brabbins
NMC
Howard Skempton's setting of this epic poem is captivatingly communicative. Roderick Williams seems ideal as the mariner recounting his cautionary tale.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 80



SZYMANOWSKI Stabat mater. Symphony No 3
Sols; Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra / Jacek Kaspszyk
Warner
Beautifully sung, with a well-judged sense of immediacy, urgency and humanity. The playing is excellent – affectionately supportive, and decisive and dramatic too.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 80



DVD/BLU-RAY
REGER 'Maximum Reger'
Various artists
Fugue State Films
Reger enthusiasts will relish this, but those not so familiar with him should equally explore such compelling advocacy of the composer's music, life and legacy, told through fascinating documentaries and glorious music-making.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 66



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
BEETHOVEN Complete String Quartets **Takács Qt**
Decca
I attended some of these sessions and can still recall the forensic care and commitment the Takács brought to these works.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 89

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FOR THE RECORD



Bright futures: Camille Thomas and the Arod Quartet

Look to the future: Erato and Deutsche Grammophon invest in young talent

Cellist Camille Thomas has signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Thomas's debut album for the label, called 'Enchantée', will feature works for cello and orchestra by Offenbach and Saint-Saëns in which she will be accompanied by the Lille National Orchestra and their Music Director Alexandre Bloch. The album will also include guest appearances by tenor Rolando Villazón and violinist Nemanja Radulovic´.

The 28-year-old Franco-Belgian has already appeared on a handful of recordings, most notably 'Réminiscences' – a mixed recital including Ysaÿe's Cello Sonata with pianist Julien Libeer on the La Dolce Volta label – and 'A Century of Russian Colours', which was recorded alongside pianist Beatrice Berrut and features Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata (on Fuga Libera).

Thomas expressed her delight in signing for the yellow label: 'There is something truly special for me about recording for Deutsche Grammophon, sharing in its unrivalled tradition, exploring exciting projects and working with other members of its great family of artists. I look forward to building new audiences for the cello in partnership with the yellow label.'

Meanwhile, Erato has signed the Arod Quartet, who were founded just four years ago and won First Prize at the 2016 ARD International Music Competition. Alain Lanceron, President of Warner Classics & Erato, commented: 'I've always thought of Erato's artists as family. The Arod Quartet are, in a way, descendants of the label's two longstanding, prestigious string quartets, the Artemis and Ebène, with whom they studied and with whom they share the distinction of having won the redoubtable ARD International Music Competition in Munich.'

The Arod Quartet, all in their twenties, are named after Legolas's horse in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: the name means 'swift'. Their first recording for Erato, due later this year, will feature Mendelssohn's String Quartet No 2, Op 13.

Du Yun wins 2017 Pulitzer Prize for her opera Angel's Bone

Shanghai-born composer Du Yun has won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Music for her eclectic operatic work *Angel's Bone*, beating finalists Ashley Fure with *Bound to the Bow* and Kate Soper with *Ipsa Dixit*.

Du Yun collaborated with librettist Royce Vavrek to create what the Pulitzer jury described as 'a bold operatic work that integrates vocal and instrumental elements and a wide range of styles into a harrowing allegory for human trafficking in the modern world'.

A Mendelssohn symphony cycle from Nézet-Séguin on DG

In February 2016 Yannick Nézet-Séguin performed Mendelssohn's five symphonies with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and RIAS Kammerchor at the Philharmonie de Paris. Live recordings of these performances will be released as a three-disc set by DG in June. Nézet-Séguin's earlier cycle of Schumann's symphonies, also recorded live with the COE, was an Editor's Choice recording in May 2014, with David Threasher describing it as 'a heavyweight contender in a far from uncrowded corner of the market.'

Purcell, Blow and Gibbons from The English Concert and Bickett

Wigmore Hall Live will be releasing a programme of songs, arias and duets by Purcell, Locke, Blow and Gibbons recorded in 2015 by Sarah Connolly, Rosemary Joshua, The English Concert and Harry Bicket. The recording includes Purcell's 'One charming night' and 'The plaint' from *The Fairy Queen*.

Doric String Quartet's Haydn series for Chandos continues

The Doric Quartet's first Haydn disc was a live recording on the Wigmore Hall Live label back in 2010; it was awarded an Editor's Choice with Nalen Anthoni labelling it a 'very auspicious recording debut'. They have since produced two studio recordings of Haydn quartets for Chandos: Vol 1 featured Op 20 and was shortlisted

Du Yun, 39, is a composer and performance artist. Her music exists at an artistic crossroads of orchestral, chamber music, theatre, opera, cabaret, storytelling, pop music, visual arts and noise. She views the world and indeed art as a continuum; challenging our preconceptions about genre, she invites us to view it merely as musical language, secondary to the content it conveys. Speaking to the US National Public Radio, Du Yun expressed her belief in the readiness of classical music audiences to broaden their artistic appetite: 'The audience in the art world is ready,' she said. 'The audience for literature is always ready. Our opera audience is also ready.'



Yannick Nézet-Séguin records Mendelssohn for DG

for the *Gramophone* Chamber Award in 2015. Vol 2, dedicated to Op 76, was released last year and in his review Richard Wigmore concluded: 'the Doric's daring, imaginative and technically superb performances demand to be heard'.

The third volume in their Chandos cycle will focus on the Op 64 Quartets and was recorded, like the previous two volumes, in the ideal surroundings of Potton Hall in Suffolk.

Martyn Brabbins returns to Walton for Hyperion

In 2011, *Gramophone*'s Edward Greenfield warmly welcomed Martyn Brabbins's recording of William Walton's First and Second Symphonies with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra for Hyperion. For his next Walton recording, Brabbins has teamed up with Anthony Marwood to record the Violin Concerto alongside the *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue*, the Partita for Orchestra and *Variations on a Theme by Hindemith*.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID PARRELL, SIM CANETTY-CLARKE ©BBC 2

BBC Proms 2017 – lots to look forward to this summer

The 2017 BBC Proms season has been announced. The 75-concert series, based in London's Royal Albert Hall, will open with a weekend that sees *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Year Award-winner Igor Levit playing Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto on Friday July 14, followed by Daniel Barenboim conducting Elgar's First and Second Symphonies with his Staatskapelle Berlin on the Saturday and Sunday.

Key themes throughout the season include marking several significant political anniversaries, including the centenary of the Russian Revolution, the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation and 70 years since partition and independence on the Indian subcontinent. Musical anniversaries range from 450 years since the birth of Monteverdi, to a celebration of the life and legacy of Proms conductor Sir Malcolm Sargent to mark the 50th anniversary of his death, conducted by Sir Andrew Davis. The 70th birthday of John Adams and the 80th of Philip Glass will also receive well-deserved acknowledgement.

Ensembles making their Proms debut this year include the Cincinnati Symphony, the Latvian Radio Choir and the UK's first BME orchestra, Chineke! (founded by Chi-chi Nwanoku), while debut soloists include pianists Beatrice Rana and Inon Barnaton and soprano Christiane Karg. Another first will see the Proms taking a trip to Hull, the current UK City of Culture, for a performance of Handel's *Water Music* in its 300th year.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

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BLOGS

Recent blogs on the *Gramophone* website have included two personal responses to this year's Record Store Day. In 'The Record Store as a Cultural Embassy', Andrew Mellor visits a remarkable record shop in Tórshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands, and discovers that by diversifying as 'a record label, a ticket agency,



a performance space, a common room' Tutl Records is a 'record store that would put many in London and New York to shame'.

In another fascinating blog, Michael McManus reports on the special Record Store Day release by Warner Classics of Rostropovich's 1967 recording of Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No 2 (pictured); the LP features an x-ray image of a spine and pelvis on both sides. The eye-catching image is a tribute to the people who made banned music available in the USSR by cutting recordings onto old x-ray plates.



Proms bound: (l-r) Katy Bircher, Chi-chi Nwanoku, Jools Holland, Katie Derham, John Wilson and Natalie Clein





Clockwise, from top left: Pekka Kuusisto in two contrasting concerts at his Finnish festival; Angharad and Rhodri Davies in St Giles-in-the-Fields and at All Tomorrow's Parties Festival

BLURRED *boundaries*

The 'classical music' label is proving outdated for many of today's creative artists who thrive on the ever-decreasing gap between the art form and other music genres, writes **Kate Molleson**

A case study. Last summer on the shores of Lake Tuusula in Finland, at 'Our Festival' directed by the violinist Pekka Kuusisto, I heard a performance of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet with singer/songwriter Laura Moisio interspersing warped pop songs about love and hurt between the movements. The previous day, when it was announced composer Einojuhani Rautavaara had died, Kuusisto walked on stage alone and played a solemn traditional Finnish polska. That night he blazed his way through the gypsy dances of Bartók's *Contrasts* with a rugged, unapologetic virtuosity. 'Our Festival is gentle,' Kuusisto wrote in his manifesto. 'Our Festival wants to invent new flexible forms for concerts, where the message is more important than dress codes or good behaviour.'

Kuusisto and his brother Jaakko (also a violinist) grew up improvising. Their father would sit at the piano playing jazz standards while the two boys sat on either side adding bass lines and solos. Pekka's formal violin training was elite and in 1995 he became the first Finn to win the International Sibelius Violin Competition, but he says his artistic epiphany happened when a friend took him to a folk festival in northern Finland. 'Those fiddlers looked so happy,' he told me. 'It seemed like they had an honest reason for playing.'

A second case study. The French composer Éliane Radigue discovered *musique concrète* in the early 1950s. 'One morning', she recalls, 'I heard it on the radio and said to myself, "Well, that's it!" It was the realism of the sounds, you know? That you could take any ordinary object and find music in it.' Radigue had grown up singing in choirs and playing harp



Anthony Braxton on stage at the Jazz Middelheim Festival, Antwerp, and conducting an orchestral rehearsal in Brooklyn

in the grand Parisian tradition. Her training was conventional; her ear and mind were inquisitive. She began working in Pierre Schaeffer's Studio d'Essai and was later assistant to Pierre Henry. She spliced together reels of magnetic tape and found herself marvelling at the 'mistakes' – the notes between notes, the ephemeral sounds made by accidental electronic feedback.

In the 1970s, Radigue brought a synthesiser back from New York to Paris and started making exquisitely slow pieces that integrated Buddhist meditation and lingered around partials and subharmonics. Around the turn of the millennium, she explored how to produce a similar language using acoustic instruments and she has since written more than 50 solo and chamber works. The select musicians who work with Radigue come from noise, improvisation, jazz, classical and various other traditions. The festivals and concert series that programme them self-identify as 'experimental' or 'adventurous' or 'underground' or plain 'contemporary'. Radigue doesn't limit herself to any particular label. She says her technique boils down to 'fade in, fade out, cross fade'. She is the master of the in-between.

A third case study. Two musicians who perform Radigue's music regularly are harpist Rhodri and violinist Angharad Davies – brother and sister who trained in classical music and ended up at the heart of the UK's experimental music scene. When they were children, they played with their father, an amateur trumpeter, in the Aberystwyth Silver Band. They recall a formative Ivesian experience one afternoon when the band ventured out to sea on two separate tugboats: tubas and baritones on one boat, drums, cornets and conductor on the other. Angharad played tenor horn and Rhodri played percussion. 'Of course the boats accidentally drifted apart,' Rhodri recalls. 'The music started sounding really weird. It was hilarious.'

Back in the Davies household, the grandmothers sang hymns and the parents listened to Peter Skellern, Barbara Dickson, Elaine Paige, brass band music. The children had free instrument lessons at school from the age of seven. 'Dad always encouraged us to try things out,' says Angharad. They made pioneering cassette-tape noise art by pouring water into the toilet and pretending it was someone having a pee. Both went on to work in professional orchestras but both became disillusioned with the creative strictness and ingrained hierarchies, so shifted toward more free-wheeling improvised and experimental music circles. Angharad remembers her father attending a concert in which she played music by the veteran American avant-gardist Alvin Lucier. 'Afterwards, dad said to me, "All those years of study and now you're playing one note",' she smiles. Her reply? 'Oh, but what a note!'

A fourth case study. Anthony Braxton grew up on the south side of Chicago in the 1950s. At school he played bebop and show tunes; he did a stint in the army in his twenties before fellow saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell got him involved in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) – a radical black artists' collective that would become a driving force in American avant-garde culture and racial politics. It was an environment where 'no one was so much concerned with labels', he describes, where 'everybody came from different directions and eventually they went and continued in their own directions'.

Braxton listened to Hildegard von Bingen, Edgar Varèse and La Monte Young as much as he listened to Charlie Parker, Dave Brubeck and John Coltrane. In 1969, his groundbreaking album 'For Alto' – the first ever full-length album for unaccompanied saxophone – was inspired by the solo piano works of Schoenberg and Stockhausen and included dedications to John Cage and Cecil Taylor. Frustrated by how the American music industry insisted on typecasting a black musician with a saxophone as a 'jazz cat', he went to Paris and investigated the city's electronic music studios. He ignored prejudice that implied he was too black for classical music and too cerebral for jazz. He wrote pieces for a hundred tubas and launched a roving cycle of operas in the model of Socratic-style dialogues. He never limited himself to one instrument, one tradition, one set of parameters; instead of 'jazz', he chose to call himself a 'creative musician'.



Christopher Stark, co-artistic director of The Multi-Story Orchestra, involves schoolchildren in a concert in a Peckham car park

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAARIT KYTÖHARJU/OUR FESTIVAL; MAARIT KYTÖHARJU/MEIDÄN FESTIVAALI; MAARIT KYTÖHARJU; AGATA URBANIAK; BRYONY MCINTYRE; ARIKA PETER VAN BREUKELEN/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES; RAMIN TALAIE/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; AMBRA VERNUCCIO



Composer Anna Meredith letting loose at the BBC 6 Music showcase at SXSW in Texas, and working with Sound Intermedia and the London Sinfonietta for a piece at QEH

Here's a different kind of case study. The classical programme of the 2017 Edinburgh International Festival contains 48 concerts, four operas, five works by living men (Jörg Widmann, Matthias Pintscher, James MacMillan, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Ned Bigham) and just one work by a woman (Clara Schumann). In another section of the brochure labelled 'contemporary', you will find Anoushka Shankar, Jarvis Cocker, PJ Harvey and other pop, folk and jazz artists whom the festival's director Fergus Linehan considers to have 'provenance' and 'seriousness'.

Linehan was responsible for introducing that designated 'contemporary' strand to EIF two years ago, stressing back then that the concert series must fit together. 'There's no point in putting on completely different events that play to completely different crowds,' he told me in 2015. 'Yes, everyone gets very excited by a concert hall full of under-40s, but if it doesn't fit with the festival as a whole, we can't justify it.' Now Linehan seems less concerned with presenting music that thrives between designated genres, audiences and spaces. 'It's really complicated,' he says when I enquire why there is scant new music in the classical section and next to no classical music into the contemporary bit. 'It's not simple. Any attempt to simplify it is not useful.'

Unruly plurality has played havoc with attempts to tidy the classical music narrative into any kind of neat trajectory

Simple, maybe not, but grappling with the complexity is useful and enriching – and plain representative of how a lot of music is made and heard today. Besides the unacceptability of that gender imbalance in the classical series (not to mention other diversity indicators), EIF's programming fails to reflect the happy mess and nuance of today's music ecosystem. 'Audiences like labels,' says Linehan, but labels that construct walls around specific genres are only indicative of an industry that tells concert-goers to know what they like and like what they know. Those labels make it easier to distinguish the 'us' and the 'them' – easier for ticket-buyers to navigate a brochure without risking ambiguity or chance encounters with an 'other'.

'Classical' and 'contemporary' are old-school binary. They are market-driven categorisations that have become less and less applicable since *musique concrète*, since the AACM, since the cassette tape, since the internet, since globalisation. Now is the age of cross-pollination. Maybe now is the age of no terms at all. If you want a term, try for something that encompasses alt-classical, indie-classical, neo-classical, folk-classical, experimental-classical, creative music, sound art, noise art, performance art, electronica, ambient, improvisation. 'Classical' is simultaneously too precise and too vague, and misleadingly backward-looking. André de Ridder – violinist, astute interpreter of Baroque/Classical/Romantic/20th-century repertoire and go-to orchestral conductor for indie bands and experimental pop artists – opts for the term 'current music'. 'It's less exclusive,' he argues. 'It acknowledges the kind of intelligent music being made across many genres by artists who might not have institutional funding and who speak to audiences in different ways at different venues.'

I'm not talking about crossover or fusion. Naff appropriation has been part of the music industry for centuries – plenty of Romantic composers plonked folksy songs into their music, but for the most part they plundered material out of published anthologies from the safety of their armchairs, and the complicating contours were smoothed out, prettified, made polite and assimilated into an acceptable language of formal composition. Porous boundaries between genres are only interesting when respect for and integrity of both genres is upheld.

Bartók was part of the first generation of composer-ethnomusicologists who travelled extensively, armed with new recording technology and a genuine respect for peasant culture. His field recordings influenced his own music profoundly but never in a cheap or approximate way: he adopted the rogue rhythms of the vernacular songs, the untameable angles of the dances, and his writing grew increasingly taut, jagged, dissonant and bold as a result. He took both traditions seriously. It was a new kind of folk-informed musical realism.

Ever since the collapse of the august compositional schools of the 20th century, an unruly plurality has played havoc with attempts to tidy the classical music narrative into any kind of neat trajectory. Maybe minimalism was the first term to try to harness that disparateness – to put an official 'ism' on its blithe mix of jazz and pop music, counterculture and non-Western models. These elements weren't just cute quotations: they defined the music's shape, ethos and listening experience. Terry Riley's *In C* appealed to a mass audience by challenging the safety line between high and low cultures. What was Western art music if it was no longer 'Western' or 'art'? Like Woodstock and birth control, this music defied establishment societal structures and thereby empowered those on the sidelines to feel welcome.

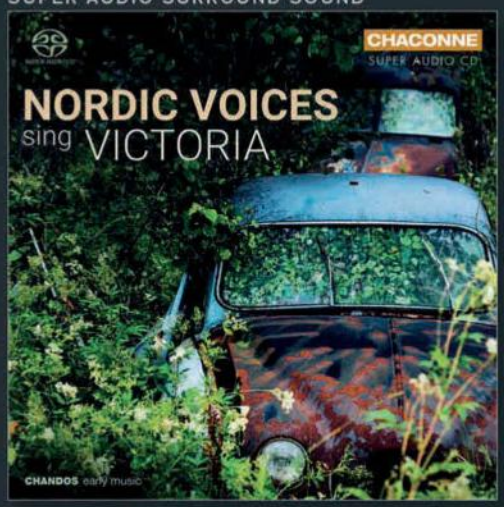
Is there is a danger of exoticism? Of dilution? Of tokenism? Do we risk prizing novelty, inclusiveness and blurred terminology above heritage and elite achievement?

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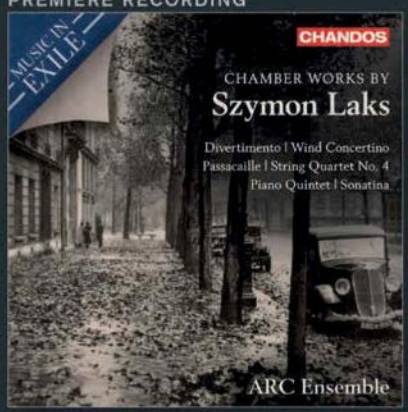
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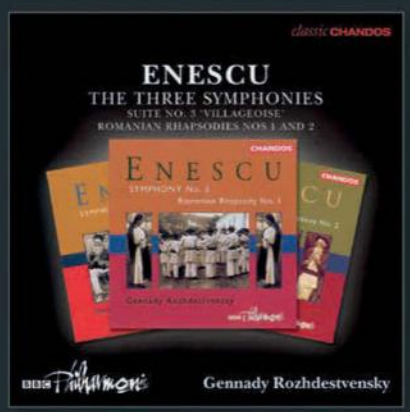


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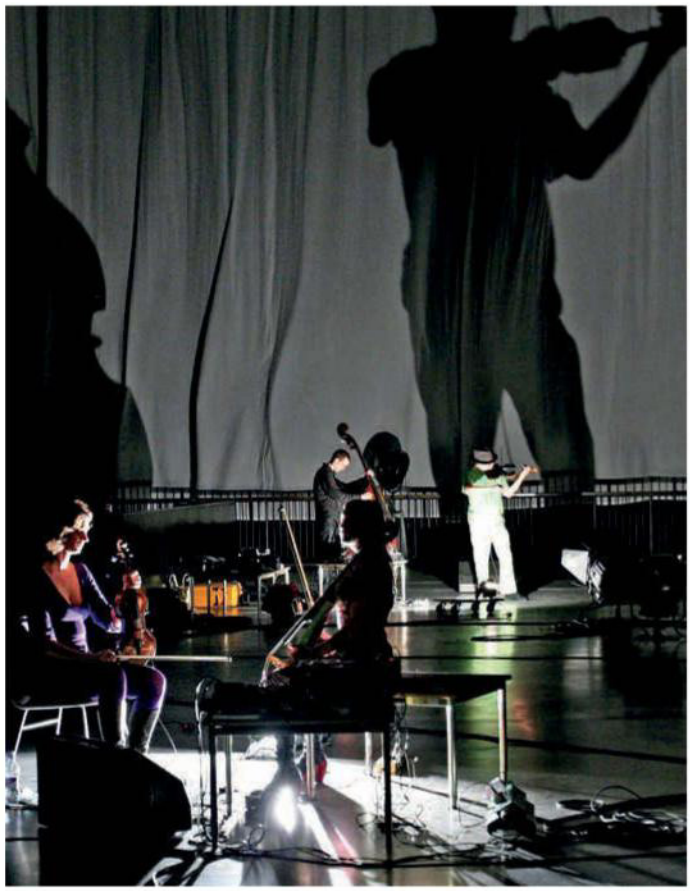
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'Over on the populist periphery, the number of events creeps up each year,' wrote *The Telegraph*'s critic Ivan Hewett about the 2015 BBC Proms programme. 'Some say this is the thin end of a wedge which will eventually drive classical music from its core position.' That's unlikely, Hewett went on to point out, given the sheer bulk of the Proms' two-month orchestral offering.

In a recent *Guardian* article, the writer Charlotte Gill argued that 'diversity breeds diversity', suggesting the UK's music education system should shift its weighting away from conventional notation. She hit a nerve. One responding letter – 'her conclusions about musical notation and theoretical skills amount to simple anti-intellectualism' – earned 650 signatures by musicians from Sir Simon Rattle to Michael Nyman to Tansy Davies. In another letter, the pianist Susan Tomes posited that 'all music-making is certainly beneficial' but that 'Western art music demonstrates a complexity and depth which few other musical genres have attained'.



Angharad Davies in 'Unprojectable: Projection and Perspective' at the Tate Modern

'We thought that, rather than waiting for the BBC orchestras to call us, we'd write stuff for our mates' – *Anna Meredith, composer*

Tomes is right to stand up for complexity and depth, but her explicit valuation of Western art music above other genres is hardly conciliatory. It's the same standpoint that justifies the proportion of public arts funding and infrastructure granted to orchestras and opera companies in the UK. It's also the same standpoint that perpetuates an out-of-date hierarchy and does little favours to the health of music either inside or outside the walls of institutional privilege.

'Maybe galleries are easier because you can walk away. Part of the problem is the concert-hall environment. Way too much like a church.' Rhodri Davies suspects new music could build an audience as broad and stylistically promiscuous as those interested in contemporary visual art – if only it sorted out the listening experience. Davies isn't alone in his thinking. Many of the prominent initiatives in new music over the past decade have moved away from the Victorian-era class trappings of the concert hall, real or imagined. Series like Bastard Assignments and Nonclassical have infiltrated pubs and clubs in East London. The composer Kate Whitley co-founded The Multi-Story Orchestra in a car park in Peckham with the intention of getting an audience closer to the music they were hearing. New York venue Le Poisson Rouge says its mission 'is to revive the symbiotic relationship between art and revelry; to establish a creative asylum for both artists and audiences'.

The London Contemporary Music Festival filled a car park in Marylebone (more car parks) with a conspicuously youthful and artsy crowd. In 2015, LCMF featured the music of Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou – an Ethiopian nun who studied classical piano in Cairo in the 1930s and wrote off-kilter waltzes infused with Chopin, Amharic church music and the blues. The following year, the festival programmed the music of Julius Eastman (1940-90), a transgressive African-American composer/pianist/baritone behind works like *Gay Guerrilla* and *Crazy Nigger*. In amongst these novelties were pieces by canonical troublemakers like Babbitt, Stockhausen, Cowell and Cage.

But for all the hipness of a leaky car park, a finely tuned concert hall is still the best place to hear a symphony orchestra. Traditional structures – the orchestra, the shoebox concert hall – still deliver heights of experience that must never be lost. Rather than abolishing those structures, how to make the infrastructural boundaries around them more porous? Israeli conductor/violinist Ilan Volkov has thought a lot about borders and space. A decade ago he co-founded an experimental music series at Levontin 7 in the central district of Tel Aviv; it's a place where music is delivered unapologetically, viscerally and with a total lack of concern for the niceties of neat labels. Four years later, he founded the Tectonics festival – first in Iceland, then in Glasgow, now with editions around the world. The name is inspired by that great jumble of fault lines running a cleft through Iceland's interior. The mission is to redefine the roles and responsibilities of a symphony orchestra within its community – not by dumbing down, but by inviting non-classical musicians, composers and audiences into the spaces traditionally reserved for orchestras. Within less than a decade, Volkov's model has found a way for orchestras to engage with the noises made beyond their venerated walls, and has enticed those on the outside to try coming in.

Anna Meredith is one of the most visible faces in UK contemporary music. She writes for concert halls and for clubs. 'I love feeling stuff,' she says. 'If I'm really into something, I can feel myself clench my fist. I'm off my seat.' Her debut electronic dance album, 'Varmints', is a bright-energy rumpus of vintage arcade sounds and instrumental layering. It was released in 2016 and Meredith has since been the darling of indie platforms like Texan festival South by Southwest (SXSW) and the BBC 6 Music Festival. Her shift into party music was a personal quest for two things: the visceral and the collegiate. She loves loud volumes and found she couldn't get enough palpable impact in a concert hall.

Meredith's magpie references, high/low cultural eclecticism (Bruckner, video games), DIY gung-ho-ness and ease in shifting between venues – all that is in keeping with the times. In the early 2000s, she and a group of fellow students from the Royal College of Music formed the Camberwell Composers' Collective. 'We thought that rather than sitting back and waiting for the BBC orchestras to call us, we should just do stuff ourselves,' Meredith says. 'So we wrote things for our mates.' They remixed each other's pieces using free audio software like Cool Edit Pro. Meredith wrote *Axeman*, three minutes of mayhem for bassoon and distortion pedal. 'It felt like safety in numbers,' she says. 'We put on small gigs and introduced our pieces by actually speaking to audiences.' Eventually the BBC orchestras did come calling. 'Maybe we gave each other the confidence to try stuff out,' she says. 'It was more important than any teaching.'

When the Camberwell lot were in their teens, they might have frequented the classical rooms of CD shops like HMV. Remember the soft-close glass door and hushed atmosphere that separated Bach and Beethoven from pop and the rest? But they were on the cusp. From college age, that generation listened online. They downloaded, shared, streamed, YouTubed. Where the major record labels dictated the listening options of previous generations, the decline of the majors allowed the rise of smaller, nimbler labels that could cater to, guide, even create a more laterally inquisitive customer.

ECM was first out of the starting blocks when it released Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* in the 1970s and accidentally uncovered a nascent and hungry new music audience. Jordi Savall's Alia Vox interwove viol music with traditions from around the Mediterranean and enticed both early and world music listeners. Today, labels like London's PRAH, Sheffield's Another Timbre, Montreal's Constellation and New York's New Amsterdam Records (to name just a few) join dots between various margins of the mainstream. One of my favourite releases of last year was a collection of works by the English composer Laurence Crane on Hubro (2/17) – an Oslo-based label mainly associated with experimental pop and jazz. Suddenly Crane's music was on rotation on Radio 3 and 6 Music simultaneously.

There is a timeliness to all this. Classical music has never been a hermit state; maybe now's the moment to champion the kind of border crossings driven by mutual respect from musicians, programmers, funders and audiences on both sides. Edinburgh International Festival was established in 1947 amid a climate of extreme polarisation. The founders recognised that the arts could help. With internationalist optimism, they ignored post-war national identity politics and invited German, Austrian and Italian conductors and orchestras in the first years of the festival. The city was declared a 'platform for the flowering of the human spirit'.

Today we find borders defining the geo-political agenda once again. We see walls going up, metaphorically, physically, across the English Channel, along the southern United States, around the rock of Gibraltar. Our media is dominated by populist politics and tribal sloganeering that steamrollers nuanced narrative. Far-right movements and Facebook algorithms silo 'us' and 'them' based on economic demographics, colour, gender, welfare values, football teams and click habits. How can stories reflecting in-between opinion – or indeed the in-between realms of music – cut through? Let's celebrate a paradigm shift that has long been happening in music – even, or especially, if it flouts the dominant political rhetoric of the times. G

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Jiří Bělohlávek has galvanised his forces at the Czech Philharmonic since returning in 2012

Standing proud: today's Czech Philharmonic

With its new Decca recording of Dvořák's Stabat mater, Jiří Bělohlávek's orchestra continues its trajectory from struggling ensemble to cultural ambassador, writes **Neil Fisher**

'Do not wonder that I am so religious,' Antonín Dvořák once wrote to a friend when writing his Mass in D major. 'An artist who is not could not accomplish anything like this.'

I'm thinking of the Czech composer's spiritual credo as Jiří Bělohlávek gives a stern upbeat to the Czech Philharmonic and another of Dvořák's acts of faith begins: the *Stabat mater*. There is something of a rite about the entire experience, not just because of the text, but because the *Stabat mater* is a yearly fixture in Prague at the beginning of spring, because the Czech Philharmonic is performing in its venerable home, the Rudolfinum, and because Bělohlávek himself, recently ill, seems to draw newfound strength from music of grief and redemption.

For all their militant atheism, the Communists couldn't prevent Prague churches from performing the *Stabat mater* during their years in charge, although it was a less frequent item in the concert halls. For the 71-year-old Bělohlávek, now in his second and hugely acclaimed stint as the orchestra's Chief Conductor, continuity is important, both in faith and in style. 'This orchestra does not sound the same as others, and we are very, very happy that we have that quality, and that we can guard it.'

'This orchestra does not sound the same as others, and we are very, very happy that we have that quality, and that we can guard it' – Jiří Bělohlávek, Chief Conductor

As for Dvořák, 'he was really at the beginning of this orchestra, and we are very proud of that'. Indeed, Bělohlávek reminds me that the main hall of the Rudolfinum is called the Dvořák Hall. Dvořák showpieces, such as the *Slavonic Dances* – another work that I hear Bělohlávek and the Czech Philharmonic perform with supreme vitality – are taken extra seriously. 'The *Slavonic Dances* belong to our core repertoire. And it sounds like simple music, simple songs, "nice pieces", but it's the hardest Dvořák, for every orchestra! It's really very hard to do it correctly, and nicely.'

The Prince of Salina in Giuseppe di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* famously observes that 'everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same'. This is a useful way of understanding the recent history of the Czech Philharmonic, whose fortunes have altered as dramatically as the country it represents. Now, sporting a record deal with Decca that has allowed Bělohlávek to revisit the great Czech works (alongside a few rarities by Janáček and Suk) and Semyon Bychkov to steer a Tchaikovsky symphony cycle, the orchestra has roared back to life. It's on an even financial keel again. More importantly, it's playing – to use Bělohlávek's understated adjectives – extra correctly and extra nicely.

While Dvořák's faith is never in doubt in the *Stabat mater*, sometimes a reverential fug can seep into a performance. Bělohlávek's reading, if not a radical rethink, is a lively spring clean and polish, the 'Eia mater' movement flowing limpidly, while the sprightly 'Tui nati vulnerati' has an almost dance-like lilt.

Decca's recording is based on this live performance and preserves its energy, with the grain and gleam of the Slavic orchestra offset by the international singers. The outstanding soloist is Michael Spyres, much in demand now in Berlioz and *bel canto*, who makes light of the high tenor part and brings emotional vulnerability to the music as well as muscular energy.

Categorising an orchestra's sound is a tricky game to play. There is a distinctiveness to the Czech Philharmonic, however, even if no one can quite put their finger on what it is. The orchestra's General Manager, Robert Hanč, is flummoxed. 'You know it's unique, but how to describe it…' The Philharmonic's talented young horn player, Kateřina Javůrková, is more thoughtful. 'We have a softer, sweeter sound than they do in Germany. I think if I heard a German or a Czech horn player, I'd hear the difference.' Javůrková auditioned once for the Tonkünstler Orchestra in Vienna but they stopped her after just a few bars. 'I thought it was quite good, but someone told me that in Vienna they don't use any vibrato – nothing. And when they hear anyone who does…it's finished.'

Certainly there's a delicious kind of 'bounce', a pulse to the brass and woodwind that seems somehow Czech, both Bohemian and bohemian (the woodwind, too, apply vibrato more than a British or German player would think polite), and it complements the dark timbre of the strings. I ask Bělohlávek if he can explain the Philharmonic sound to me. He furrows his brow. 'It has a very clear connection with this hall, because this hall is very lively. And at the same time, when you're on the stage, it's not ideal for listening to each other. So it requires a special sort of playing.

'The other, probably more important, reason for the sound is that actually 99 per cent of the musicians are Czechs, and were trained here. So the combination is probably the source of this special sound.'

It's a sound that Bělohlávek has helped to shape for more than half his life. He remembers making his Czech Philharmonic debut – an out-of-town concert in Chrudim, eastern Bohemia, in 1973. 'A small town but with quite enlightened people –

PHOTOGRAPHY: ČESKÁ FILHARMONIE

they had a great tradition of concerts.' Dvořák, of course, was on the bill: the Cello Concerto and the Eighth Symphony. Was it less pressurised, because it wasn't in Prague? 'Not for me!'

Bělohlávek's first official position in the Czech capital, however, was with the Prague Symphony: he was Chief Conductor of the ensemble from 1977 until 1989. When he started, the Communist government was in the midst of the post-Prague Spring crackdown. 'It was the era of what was known as "normalisation". It was quite difficult. We called it "abnormalisation", because it meant freezing everything. Everything was subject to the dictates of the Communist party, and that was not easy.'



Bělohlávek coaxes mezzo Elisabeth Kulman in the live recording of the Stabat mater

When the Velvet Revolution kicked off in 1989, Bělohlávek was not among the throngs of pro-democracy supporters in Wenceslas Square, although that's where his wife and two small children were. He and the Prague Symphony were instead fending off their increasingly flustered government minders in Tokyo on an orchestral tour. 'We fought with them', Bělohlávek recalls, 'for the right to express our support. By the time we came back, all the dramatic developments were over.'

'We have a softer, sweeter sound than they do in Germany. If I heard a German or a Czech horn player, I'd hear the difference' – *Kateřina Javůrková, horn player*

Czechoslovakia's new freedoms – freedoms shortly to be divided between the Czech Republic and Slovakia after the 'Velvet Divorce' – should have led to a new golden era for the Philharmonic, then in the last years of the long reign of Václav Neumann. In 1990 Bělohlávek succeeded Neumann and became Chief Conductor, the job he'd coveted for decades.

In the post-Communist world, however, everyone in the Philharmonic suddenly had a view on what they thought the direction should be. Bělohlávek came in all guns blazing, the young man wanting to make his mark: 'I said what I thought, and that was it. Quality was the only thing I valued.'

After years of toeing the line, the orchestra sniffed the democratic breeze and fancied an alternative. In 1991 they voted to replace Bělohlávek with the orchestra's first foreign Chief Conductor, the German maestro Gerd Albrecht. 'He fed the idea that he would bring flashy contracts and good tours and better conditions, and they thought an international conductor would add some glamour. On the other hand, I was a conductor who they'd known already for 17 years, suddenly telling them they're not good enough.'



Bělohlávek shares the stage with the Prague Philharmonic's Choirmaster Lukáš Vasilek

It was the orchestra that suffered much more than Bělohlávek, who went on to build an international career that included seven years at the BBC Symphony Orchestra. For the Philharmonic, the sunlit uplands of big money and big gigs never materialised. Albrecht resigned in 1996 after a row that even dragged in Czech President Václav Havel. A succession of enfeebled maestros followed. The orchestra's 33-year-old timpanist Michael Kroutil remembers what it was like when he joined the Philharmonic, then led by conductor Zdeněk Mácal. 'He didn't want rehearsals. Only concerts. So the atmosphere was very free…like a restaurant. But not so good for the music.' By then it suited the players not to rehearse, because they were earning less than £3000 a year and needed as many other jobs as they could get.

Throughout these privations, Bělohlávek's affection for the Philharmonic remained. 'I didn't lose my love for them. And actually we never lost contact. Sometimes it wasn't pleasant, because I could judge how the orchestra was developing and it was not satisfying.' The orchestra's embattled management asked Bělohlávek more than once to come back. His reply was: 'What has changed since I left? And it was always clear: nothing.'

What finally clinched the deal was a new management team who had quietly been raising standards at the Brno Philharmonic, showing plenty of commercial nous at the same time. They were David Mareček, who is now CEO of the Philharmonic, and Hanč, General Manager. 'We had worked in Brno for almost six years and were quite happy there,' Hanč recalls. 'When we learnt about the situation at the Czech Philharmonic in 2010, we weren't sure if we wanted to come from Brno to Prague – there had been a crisis, the musicians had been going on strike, there were artistic and financial difficulties. But of course the Philharmonic is the first orchestra of the Czech Republic so we decided to try.'

They sat down with Bělohlávek first. 'We told him how we think an orchestra should be run and he told us about his ideas. Our goals and opinions were very similar. And so Mr Bělohlávek said yes.'

Ahead of Bělohlávek's return in 2012, Mareček and Hanč implemented the changes that the

conductor had asked for. In return for higher player salaries (the government coughed up extra funds, but on condition of more private fundraising), Bělohlávek got more rehearsals, the right to hire and fire, and, crucially, the players relinquished their hold over recordings. New deals could now be done; the Decca contract would have been unimaginable without the new agreement. Clever partnerships have been forged with private companies such as Škoda (their days of ridicule long since over) and with the Czech government: when the Czech Philharmonic tours, it can now take advantage of free rides on planes belonging to the Czech Air Force, taking the expression 'cultural offensive' to a new level.

As well as making astute deals, however, Hanč and Mareček have a clear-eyed vision of what the orchestra's mission is. They want the Philharmonic to be a cultural beacon in the city. 'It should be offering Czech audiences what the Vienna Philharmonic is offering Austrian audiences, or what Berlin is offering German audiences,' says Hanč. They want the orchestra to be an ambassador abroad, whether physically – there are ambitious residencies scheduled at the Musikverein in Vienna and New York's Carnegie Hall – or through new recordings. 'It's a very important thing as not every country, especially of this size, has such a famous or strong orchestra, so the orchestra can represent the Czech Republic abroad.' And they have spearheaded a new raft of educational projects for all ages and all abilities. Bělohlávek's contract, meanwhile, has now been extended into the 2021/22 season, ensuring the artistic stability the orchestra for so long lacked.

'The Czech Philharmonic is as great as it used to be under Ančerl and Kubelík – that's the message we want to get across'
– Robert Hanč, General Manager

Hanč is pragmatic about the focus on Czech classics, both on foreign tours and on record. (Kroutil, off-message, cheekily tells me that he simply now refuses to play another performance of the *New World* Symphony.) For Hanč, the core Czech repertoire is a cultural and national statement. 'This is how we can help the orchestra get back on the map, how we can help the country,' he says. Sales figures matter to him and the orchestra's recent recordings of the Dvořák symphonies have done unexpectedly well. 'Perhaps it's superficial but it's important for us that our recordings get to many people.' His top line is clear: the glory days are back. 'The Czech Philharmonic is as great as it used to be under Ančerl and Kubelík – that's the message we want to get across.'

On repertoire, Bělohlávek takes a slightly different view. 'We're very happy to play Czech music and happy to bring it, but I always try to fight for some different music, to combine different composers. Martinů is still to be discovered. It's not easy to convince promoters that Dvořák is not only the *New World* Symphony. So we have quite a lot of tasks ahead.'

The *Stabat mater* is not rare Dvořák fare, either. Yet a fine sense of discovery and wonder imbues this Prague performance. A lot of water has flowed under the Charles Bridge to get this conductor and this orchestra playing like this: plenty of grief, quite a lot of acrimony. Tonight, however, mourning becomes them: the mourning of the Virgin Mary for her son. And Dvořák's deep Christian faith is matched by the fervour of an orchestra that has had, in its own way, a resurrection. G

▶ The Czech Philharmonic's disc of Dvořák's Stabat mater is reviewed on page 75

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETRA HAJSK

NEW RELEASES

SUPRAPHON



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Launched in 2012, Gramophone's Hall of Fame celebrates the people who have most shaped the classical music recording industry. In the following pages you can discover the 10 names we've welcomed into our Hall of Fame for 2017, as chosen by our readers, along with tributes to their talent.

GRAMOPHONE HALL OF FAME



KYUNG WHA CHUNG

(*b*1948) Violinist

Born into a highly musical family (her brother Myung Whun is a pianist and conductor; her sister Myung Wha a cellist) Chung's prodigious talent made her a child star in her native Korea. She moved to New York, aged 13, and studied at Juilliard with Ivan Galamian. In 1968 her success in the Edgar Leventritt Competition (placed joint first with Pinchas Zukerman) led to debuts with the Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic. The 1960s and '70s saw her record the core repertoire for Decca, leaving numerous classic versions. She would later record for EMI, returning last year to the label (now Warner Classics) with a disc of solo Bach following a 13-year hiatus caused by an injury.

SIR JAMES GALWAY *Flautist*

Kyung Wha Chung is the outstanding violinist of her time and age. I first heard her play when I was in the Berlin Philharmonic. She came as a guest soloist and played the *Scottish Fantasy* of Max Bruch. It was conducted by Eugen Jochum, and I played the flute in the orchestra. This was a stellar moment in my life. It was truly great violin-playing and very inspirational. We next met up in London in the early 1980s, and recorded the Trio Sonatas from *A Musical Offering* by Bach. To this day, I think it is one of the best recordings of this work. It may not be what is considered a 'Baroque' performance, but it certainly is played with great depth of feeling and I feel honoured to have made this recording with Kyung Wha. I am delighted that her contribution to music is being acknowledged by her admittance into *Gramophone*'s Hall of Fame.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Bartók
Violin Concerto No 2
CBSO / Rattle
Warner Classics (6/94)



PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON FOWLER



JONAS KAUFMANN

(*b*1969) Tenor

Born in Munich, where he studied, Kaufmann is one of very few tenors who sings both the Italian and German repertoires with equal success. A Don José (Carmen) of note, he is also celebrated as Cavaradossi (Tosca), but more recently has taken on heavier roles with his first Otello planned next month at Covent Garden. As a recitalist, he has enjoyed acclaim in Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin and Winterreise. He has won Gramophone Awards for his recordings of Puccini's Madama Butterfly, Beethoven's Fidelio, an album of Strauss songs and a verismo aria collection.

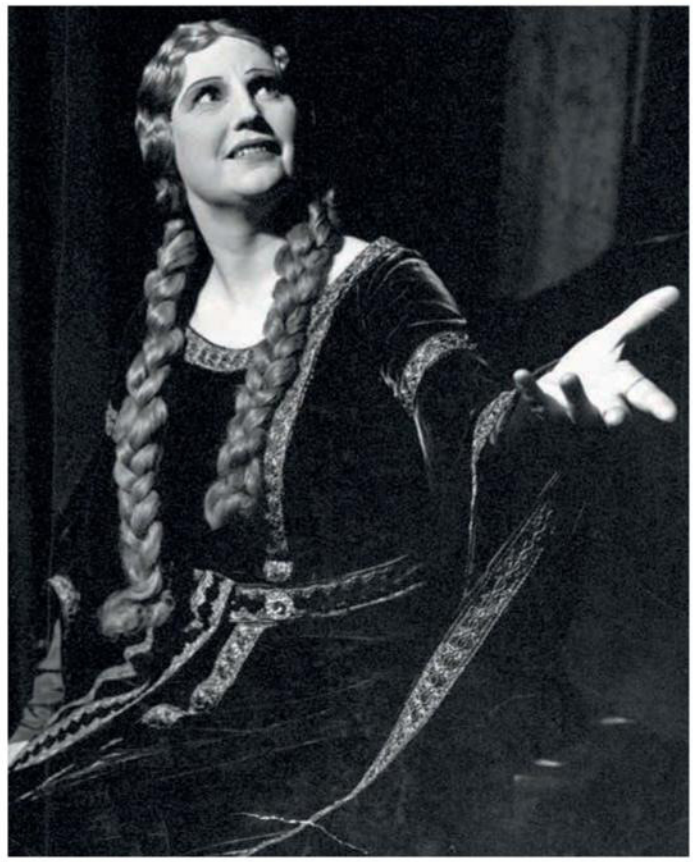
SIR ANTONIO PAPPANO *Conductor and pianist*

When we think of the tenor voice, conjuring up a rendition of 'La donna è mobile' in our minds is all too easy, the final high note after a dizzying cadenza ringing for what seems like a minute. Jonas Kaufmann is very well aware of all the clichés; in fact, his knowledge of the 'traditions' of all departments of the repertoire is prodigious. Uncannily, it is this knowledge together with his natural musicality that makes him unique as a singing artist. His choices are always complex, rooted in the meaning of the words and the history of performance practice, in all the operatic languages. He is simply insatiable, challenging his collaborators to up their game! The voice (much discussed), burnished, honeyed, allows him a freedom of expression and colour that is rare in any generation, and yes, he has great high notes.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Puccini
Madama Butterfly
Gheorghiu; Pappano
Warner Classics (3/09)



KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD

(1895-1962) Soprano

The Norwegian singer began as a lyric soprano but an audition at the Met started her on the path for which she is best known, as a great Wagnerian soprano. Her Met debut in 1935 as Sieglinde was a sensation and over the next three decades she would become the Brünnhilde, Isolde and Senta of the day. She gave the premiere of Richard Strauss's Four Last Songs in London in 1950 under Furtwängler, with whom she would later record Isolde. She sang Fricka on Solti's classic Decca recording of Das Rheingold.

DEBORAH VOIGT *Soprano*

Any singer who has performed the music of Wagner – and I've sung my fair share of Wagner roles – senses the shadow cast by Kirsten Flagstad, undoubtedly one of the greatest operatic voices of the 20th century. She possessed a truly gorgeous voice, with a tremendous legato that was one of the hallmarks of her artistry. No matter what she was singing, you never felt that she was pushing her voice. I have a very vivid memory of spending an evening with a fan who simply worshipped her, and I think we listened to just about everything Flagstad recorded over the course of five hours. What a beautiful sound! I'm told that her native Norway honoured her by, among other things, putting her on their currency. Seems appropriate given that she was an artist you could bank on for singing consistently at the highest level. On that note, maybe it's time for America to replace Andrew Jackson on our $20 bill with a soprano!



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Wagner
Die Walküre Acts 1 & 3
Knappertsbusch; Solti
Australian Eloquence

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FRITZ REINER

(1888-1963) Conductor

Born Reiner Frigyes in Budapest, he studied composition at the Academy with Hans Koessler and the piano with Béla Bartók. Nine years in Cincinnati, 10 in Pittsburgh, five at the Met and 10 in Chicago made him one of America's most powerful musicians; under Reiner, the Chicago SO in particular developed a new flexibility. Janós Starker, principal cellist at Chicago and the Met, cited his attributes as being 'knowledge, total control, minimal gestures, no time-wasting, and no show-biz'.

IVÁN FISCHER *Conductor*

The music life in the United States wouldn't be the same without Fritz Reiner. Before his emigration he absorbed the best of Europe: he had close relationships with Bartók, Richard Strauss and other musical giants. He had one ambition: to create high musical standards in American cities. Among his wonderful recordings I like the early ones made in Pittsburgh most. He accomplished amazing collective virtuosity and musicianship! When he is criticised for being tyrannical one shouldn't forget his purpose: to accomplish exceptional quality in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, New York and finally with the Chicago Symphony. I was very impressed when older Chicago orchestra members told me that although he was feared, he is mainly remembered as giving the best concerts ever with that legendary orchestra.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

R Strauss
Ein Heldenleben. Also sprach Zarathustra
Chicago SO
RCA (3/66; 6/68)



PHOTOGRAPHY: EVERETT COLLECTION INC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES



VICTORIA DE LOS ÁNGELES

(1923-2005) Soprano

Born in Barcelona, where she studied, de los Ángeles made her debut as Mimì. Her repertoire would range from Mozart to the lighter Wagner roles with many French and Italian works along the way. A wonderful recitalist, she oozed charm and invariably championed song in her native tongue. Her discography is extensive and, in the 1950s and '60s, when in her prime, her voice was an instrument of extraordinary beauty.

GRAHAM JOHNSON *Pianist*

Our rehearsals in Barcelona began with me playing *El majo tímido* by Granados with the kind of generic rubato that British musicians consider aptly Spanish: 'You poor boy, what are you doing?' interrupted Victoria in her beautifully inflected English 'This song is Castillian, not from Andalusia!' In accompanying her matchless performances of her largely undervalued patrimony – Spanish songs from five centuries – I was her awed and grateful apprentice; her performances of Lieder and French *mélodies* were enchanting, sincerity easily trouncing convention. She was a superb recitalist, and her operatic recorded legacy remains legendary: Charlotte, Manon, Marguérite, Mélisande, an immortal Mimì, two Butterflys and a Carmen without vulgarity. Her purity of voice and spirit, and her instinctive musical intelligence, exemplified Spanish culture at its most refined. The audiences who adored her were not deceived in their devoted allegiance: on stage and off, Victoria de los Ángeles was truly 'of the angels' – an adorable person with a heavenly voice, and a very great artist.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Bizet Carmen
Beecham
Warner Classics (5/60)

ARTHUR GRUMIAUX



(1921-86) Violinist

Grumiaux studied the violin in Brussels and composition in Paris (with Enescu), and went on to represent the Belgian tradition established by Ysaÿe. Known for his consistently beautiful tone and flawless intonation, he is most closely associated with the Beethoven and Mendelssohn Violin Concertos. In 2004, Edward Greenfield wrote of Grumiaux that he was 'a master virtuoso who consistently refused to make a show of his technical prowess'.

ROB COWAN *Gramophone consultant reviewer*

The principal properties of Arthur Grumiaux's playing style are memorably distinctive: the warm, lightly brushed tone, switching in a trice to a deft flick of the bow. His accounts of the Beethoven Concerto are ethereal, and grounded in a sure feeling for musical architecture. His solo Bach, which is neither romantically excessive nor dogmatically 'authentic', has long been considered a benchmark, while his Beethoven sonatas with Clara Haskil are both artfully crafted and intelligently phrased. The Grumiaux Trio's deeply expressed performances of the Mozart quintets and the great E flat String Trio likewise serve as models of interpretative equilibrium. And yet Grumiaux could charm with the best of them. My favourite of his recordings in this kind of repertoire is the version of Saint-Saëns's *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso* he made under Jean Fournet's direction, cast half-way between Heifetz's cut-glass precision and David Oistrakh's poised urbanity. Was there anything *musical* that this man couldn't do with fiddle and bow?



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Mozart Violin Concertos
LSO / C Davis
Philips (6/01)

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI

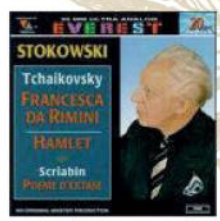


(1882-1977) Conductor

Born in London, Stokowski is best known for his association with the Philadelphia Orchestra and for his free-hands style of conducting. Stokowski was music director of orchestras including the NBC Symphony and New York Philharmonic, and founded the Hollywood Bowl SO among others. He conducted music for Disney's Fantasia and was a lifelong champion of contemporary composers.

JOSÉ SEREBRIER *Conductor and composer*

When I was 17 Leopold Stokowski premiered my First Symphony as a last-minute replacement for the still-unplayable Fourth Symphony by Charles Ives. He took a big chance because he had invited the world music press to attend the long awaited Ives premiere. It was typical. He was constantly launching new works by composers from all over the world. Very few conductors today take such chances. That habit cost him his position with the Philadelphia Orchestra, when the board got tired of the constant barrage of new music. Stokowski performed more new works than any other musician in history. When I was Stokowski's Associate Conductor at Carnegie Hall for four years, I observed his instant magic. As soon as he started conducting the sound changed. Early in the history of the gramophone, Stokowski pioneered high-quality recorded sound. He could balance the orchestra by changing the traditional seating patterns. Rehearsal technique was planned like a general going to war. When the Stokowski Society asked me to record his transcriptions I turned it down. They then sent me many contemporary recordings by various conductors and I accepted, recording four volumes with the Bournemouth Symphony, a small tribute to one of my great mentors.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Tchaikovsky Hamlet
Stadium SO of New York / Stokowski

GIDON KREMER



(b1947) Violinist

The Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer's talent and trajectory were clear from early days, studying in Riga then at the Moscow Conservatory with David Oistrakh, followed by prestigious prizes. Recordings and performances throughout the world of core repertoire have always gone hand in hand with contemporary works. In 1997 he founded Kremerata Baltica, an acclaimed chamber orchestra comprising young musicians from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

MARTIN CULLINGFORD *Gramophone Editor*

If a person can be defined by the company he keeps, Gidon Kremer's collaborators – in chamber music, Martha Argerich and Mischa Maisky; in concertos, Leonard Bernstein and Nikolaus Harnoncourt – speak volumes about him as a musician. But to such a list, we must add composers too. Kremer's extraordinary communicative gifts as a soloist in the core classical repertoire have been lent with equal passion to the music of our time, whether Arvo Pärt, Giya Kancheli, Sofia Gubaidulina, Pēteris Vasks, John Adams, Philip Glass or many others. A rewarding and substantial discography, for DG, Nonesuch, ECM and others, embodies something often said of many great artists but particularly pertinent to Kremer: that hearing him play familiar repertoire is to hear a work as if being discovered afresh, by him, and by extension by us. As he marks his 70th birthday, it's a pleasure to welcome him into the Hall of Fame.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Brahms
Piano Quartet No 1
Argerich *pf* Bashmet *va* Kremer *vn* Maisky *vc*
DG (4/04)

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION, AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. STEFAN HOEDERATH/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



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FRITZ KREISLER

(1875-1962) Violinist and composer

Born in Austria, he entered the Vienna Conservatory at the age of seven, where he studied violin and theory (the latter under Bruckner); he later studied composition with Delibes in Paris. In 1910, he premiered Elgar's Violin Concerto, composed for him, and he continued to give concerts until 1950, nine years after a near-fatal road accident in New York (where he eventually settled). He was renowned for his brilliant technique and burnished tone.

JAMES EHNES *Violinist*

Fritz Kreisler's golden sound and consummate musicianship continues to be an inspiration and a marvel, more than 50 years after his passing. The grace, dignity, charm and beauty of his playing is what many music lovers think of first, but the incredible clarity, purity of intonation and digital dexterity from his prime is also astonishing, and perhaps unmatched. Year after year I return to his recordings, particularly those he made between 1910 and 1920, when he was in his heyday and recorded technology had advanced to the point of being able to capture the perfect purity of his tone. What I would give for a recording of him playing Elgar's Violin Concerto! Few other musicians speak to me so movingly. He was a violinist who spoke directly to one's soul, and he left a rich recorded legacy for which we should all be very grateful.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Fritz Kreisler
'The Charming Maverick'
Warner Classics (8/09)

NATHAN MILSTEIN

(1903-92) Violinist

Born in Odessa, Milstein studied with Leopold Auer in St Petersburg and, after the Russian Revolution of 1917, garnered support from the composer Alexander Glazunov and formed friendships with Horowitz and Piatigorsky. He toured Europe with Horowitz in 1925, and in the 1930s began a recording career that spanned six decades.

JACK LIEBECK *Violinist*

Nathan Milstein is the first name that pops into my mind when I'm asked who my favourite violinist is. One of his main attractions for me is the expressive simplicity, sometimes almost playing with a clipped style. No gloss or over-sentimentality is added but this gives his playing a deeply human quality. I often think he sounds just like he looks, such a handsome man, almost regal in his manner, but with eyes that don't give everything away. When he played he just seemed to let the music do the talking. His sound, made up from the components of his discreet vibrato, beautiful silky bowing arm and extremely dextrous left hand (you can often hear his fingers falling so precisely on the fingerboard) are combined with his glorious 1716 Stradivari 'Maria Teresa'. This creates a sound with a raspingly beautiful E string and sonorous lower strings, all packaged with the cutting nasality that only a violin from Cremona can make. It is his no-nonsense musicianship that really stands out to me, his interpretations are beautifully simple and, over the course of a piece or movement, this shows a clarity that allows the music to almost explain itself to the listener. No fluff or over-indulgence: just pure, beautiful violin-playing.



RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Goldmark Violin Concerto
Philharmonia / Blech
Testament (11/95)

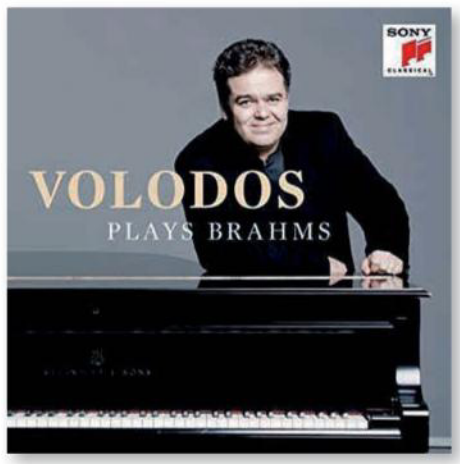


GRAMOPHONE
RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Harriet Smith rejoices in the masterly pianism of Arcadi Volodos, who lavishes his searching musical imagination and immaculate technical finish on the music of Brahms

Brahms

Piano Pieces – Op 76 Nos 1-4; Op 117; Op 118
Arcadi Volodos *pf*
Sony Classical Ⓕ 88875 13019-2 (54' • DDD)



This is one of those discs where a word count is a strange thing. For it needs only four: Go Buy This Disc. Or 4000, trying to capture why it is and how it is that Volodos creates the magic he does. It's four long years since his quietly astounding Mompou recital (8/13), which put the composer on the map for many and walked off with pretty much every award going. Brahms might seem a very different proposition but Volodos inhabits every note, every phrase with just as much conviction. My only plaint is that there could have been more – we get only the first four out of the Eight Piano Pieces, Op 76, though Opp 117 and 118 are complete. But that is a minor niggle; all these pieces have featured in his recitals and his familiarity with their every phrase is abundantly obvious. And whatever he does, you can't imagine the music going any other way, which is perhaps the definition of a great artist.

'Whatever Volodos does, you can't imagine the music going any other way, which is perhaps the definition of a great artist'

The sound Volodos coaxes from the piano, for starters, is like no one else's and has been captured superbly by Sony's engineers, utterly true to the way he sounds live in concert. It's one that is entirely devoid of hard edges, with myriad shadings right through the register, as we hear in the agitated opening piece of Op 76. Brahms's fondness for alto and tenor registers is luxuriantly realised too, though such is the subtlety of Volodos's voicings that nothing ever becomes opaque. Readings are often broad in terms of pacing, but it has the effect of giving the music time to speak and to register. From the turbulence of No 1 we move to an entirely different world in the second piece of Op 76, here reminiscent of Schubert at his most carefree, the motion deliciously wound down at the close. The third ranges from the extraordinary fragility of the writing in the upper reaches – sounding here more than ever like a music box – down to the refulgent bass, while the gentle melody of the fourth finds itself clothed in new colours on every repetition, Volodos subtly altering the mood with each one.

Even a piece as familiar as the second of the Op 117 Intermezzos sounds new in the hands of this pianist – partly a matter of colouring, partly his spacious pacing, and partly the fact that he thinks like a singer, subtly varying each phrase as if illustrating a text. The First Intermezzo in the set is a good example of 'don't try this at home', unfolding as it does at a dangerously languid pace that would become merely comatose in the hands of a lesser artist. Hands and brain, for Volodos has clearly thought minutely about every note, every phrase of the pieces on offer here, and it is that intimacy with the pieces that sets him free, allowing each one to take wing. How awestruck the minor-key inner section of this First Intermezzo sounds here (track 6, 2'34"), Volodos taking not


'The more explosive writing is always cushioned, with Volodos letting light into the textures'



Four years after his astounding Mompou recital, Volodos has made a welcome return to the recording studio

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALI SCHAFLER/SONY CLASSICAL

only its *Più adagio* to heart but also its *pp sempre ma molto espressivo* marking. How telling are those bare octaves that open No 3, too, anguish barely reined in by their *pianissimo* marking, reminding us of Brahms's description of this Intermezzo as 'the lullaby of all my griefs'. But it's not all darkness – the way he pauses before the return to Tempo 1 (track 7, 4'22") and then caresses its opening chord is yet another instance of the sheer beauty of Volodos's playing.

The more explosive writing in the six pieces that make up Op 118 is always cushioned, with Volodos letting light into the textures – a world away from the shoutiness you get from some artists. This applies not only to the opening of the set but also, more particularly, the Ballade (No 3), which is less hell for leather than it can be, and all the more striking for that. In the fourth we go on an extraordinary emotional journey in under three minutes, while the chordal fifth, with its beautifully floated middle section, is simply ravishing. In the extraordinary final number Volodos reminds us of Schoenberg's notion of 'Brahms the progressive', imbuing as he does the opening G flat with an extraordinary sense of portent, from which we journey from an almost Impressionistic wash of sound, via orchestral range and depth in its middle section, to the profound unease of the Intermezzo's final moments.

Comparisons become irrelevant in interpretations of such mesmerising honesty. An award-winner if ever I heard one. **Harriet Smith**

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Editor's Choice
Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Threasher revels in Haydn concertos played on the accordion:
'Frankly, you could play this music on the swanee whistle and kazoo and it would not lose an iota of its charm' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 35



Jeremy Nicholas discovers the music of Dimitar Nenov:
'Nenov takes us on a strangely compelling journey – once you get on, it's hard to get off' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 38

Adams · McPhee · Poulenc

'Concerti III'
Adams Grand Pianola Music[a]
McPhee Tabuh-Tabuhan
Poulenc Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra
[a]Trio Mediæval; GrauSchumacher Piano Duo; Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Brad Lubman
Neos Ⓕ NEOS21703 (71' • DDD)



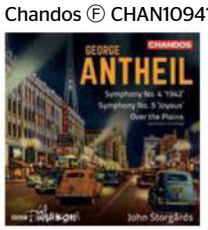
For the third instalment in their 'Concerti' series, the GrauSchumacher Piano Duo bring together three works, the first two written in close proximity. Poulenc's Concerto in D minor (1932) is typical of its composer's earlier music in using classical and popular idioms so their abrupt alternation becomes its own justification. This account emphasises the breezy neoclassical framework giving focus to the frequent high jinks, and if the *Larghetto*'s Mozartian pathos is underplayed, the gamelan patterning at the close of its predecessor feels undeniably hypnotic.

Balinese gamelan was central to Colin McPhee when he composed *Tabuh-Tabuhan* (1936). This toccata for a 'collection of percussion instruments' combines indigenous textures and harmonies with a Stravinskian incisiveness and a jazzy rhythmic freedom to the fore in the propulsive outer movements. It is here that this duo are heard at their commanding best, while missing out on some of the mystery that can make the central Nocturne so spellbinding.

Similar interpretative qualities are found in *Grand Pianola Music* (1982), one of the pieces that ensured John Adams's reputation and whose leavening of its minimalist aesthetic with elements drawn from pop and gospel – not to mention audibly Beethovenian figuration – has proved influential and popular. Persuasive in those long-breathed cumulative spans of the first part, GrauSchumacher feel a little inert in the limpid eloquence of its postlude or the charismatic immediacy of what comes next. Yet the ingenious conception of this collection is undeniable, and those keen to hear these works outside of their usual recorded context need not hesitate.
Richard Whitehouse

Antheil

Symphonies – No 4, '1942'; No 5, 'Joyous'. Over the Plains
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds
Chandos Ⓕ CHAN10941 (66' • DDD)



In 1926 Aaron Copland declared that George Antheil 'possesses the greatest gifts of any American now writing'. Ten years later, he added: 'But something always seems to prevent their full fruition. Whether this is due to a lack of artistic integrity, or an unusual susceptibility to influences, or a lack of any conscious direction, is not clear.' Those familiar with the two symphonies on this Chandos recording may nod vigorously at the phrase 'susceptibility to influences', as both bear striking resemblance to works by Shostakovich (in No 4) and Prokofiev (in No 5). Antheil is a fine melodist, however, with a sensitive feeling for harmonic colour, so I'd always rather enjoyed the music's felicities even if their brazen borrowings had me shaking my head. Honestly, given the excellence of Hugh Wolff's CPO disc of these same two symphonies, I wasn't sure the music truly merited yet another recording. I was wrong.

Rather than placing these symphonies squarely in the mid-century mainstream, as Wolff does, John Storgårds revels in their idiosyncrasies, revealing a wealth of expressive detail I'd never heard before. In Storgårds's hands, the stark and often macabre juxtapositions of the Fourth Symphony (1942) suggest that Antheil knew Mahler's music very well, and not just the Mahlerian aspects of Shostakovich's work. Storgårds doesn't quite generate the white heat that Stokowski does in the broadcast recording of the 1944 premiere (Cala), but Storgårds's emotionally involving interpretation is ultimately more satisfying.

The Fifth (1948) is only slightly less compelling. In the first movement, Storgårds's measured tempo adds weight but often at the expense of bite – though the coda packs quite a wallop. The central *Adagio* is beautifully sustained and sounds (to my ears, at least) as much Czech as Russian, particularly in the ravishing passage beginning at 1'12". And, somehow, Storgårds manages to take much of the Prokofiev out of the finale. Here, it simply sounds 'cosmopolitan' – which Antheil (friend of Joyce, Pound, Hemingway, Picasso, among others) certainly was.

The disc also includes the recorded premiere of *Over the Plains* (1945), inspired by the composer's visit to Texas. It's pure Antheil in its unabashed weirdness, veering between rollicking cowboy music, Impressionist tone-painting and (near the end) what appears to be a homage to Mahler's Seventh.

A brilliant recording all around, and an important one. Bring on the next instalment! **Andrew Farach-Colton**
Symphonies Nos 4 & 5 – selected comparison: Frankfurt RSO, Wolff (6/01) (CPO) CPO999 706-2

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73
Royal Northern Sinfonia / Lars Vogt *pf*
Ondine Ⓕ ODE1292-2 (74' • DDD)



When Lars Vogt's recordings of Beethoven's First and Second Piano Concertos with Simon Rattle and the CBSO were released in 1997, I thought them among the finest accounts of the works I had encountered. There was the hope that a complete cycle might follow but that same year Rattle began recording the concertos with Brendel and the Vienna Philharmonic (Philips, 5/99). A curate's egg



Lars Vogt directs the Royal Northern Sinfonia from the keyboard in performances of Beethoven exuding 'energy and wit'

of a cycle, it was Brendel's fourth. How much more productive it would have been to complete the Vogt which (ironically) promised to match the freshness of address of Brendel's own first cycle for Vox in the 1960s.

Such was Vogt's near-perfect mix of playfulness and fantasy, memorably accompanied by Rattle, my 1997 comparisons for the First Concerto included some of the work's most accomplished exponents: Solomon and Gilels, Brendel and Gould. Happily, the newer performance, which Vogt directs from the keyboard, is every bit as good. If the long lead to the first-movement recapitulation is not quite as magical here as in the earlier performance, the shaping of the great third cadenza is more assured and the finale has an added spaciousness and weight that takes nothing from the performance's energy and wit. As for the Royal Northern Sinfonia, they have all the responsiveness of a chamber-music ensemble, married to a range and depth of sonority which you might expect from a rather larger ensemble.

With such skills in place, it would be reasonable to expect a half-decent performance of the mighty *Emperor* Concerto. Vogt himself rarely disappoints. Yet the age-old problem persists: is it possible to realise the *Emperor*'s many-sided splendour without a conductor on hand to help shape and propel the drama? The third movement is a particular problem, not only because it is tricky to play – it's astonishing how even some of the most accomplished pianists on record fudge and finesse their way through the notes – but because it's difficult to deal with the solo role while extracting from the orchestra that mood of heroic optimism the music evidently requires. The young Zubin Mehta did it for Brendel, Klemperer for Barenboim, Böhm for Pollini. With Vogt's musicians appearing to be following the pianist rather than acting as an equal partner, the movement tends to lose shape as the music evolves.

That proviso aside, this is a distinguished start to a long-overdue cycle. The Ondine recording has admirable clarity and balance, though I was surprised by the glitch at 2'12" in the *Largo* of the First Concerto, something which was present on the finished pressings as well as on the test-pressing I was originally sent.

Richard Osborne

Piano Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:
Vogt, CBSO, Rattle (3/97[R]) (EMI) 602304-2
Piano Concerto No 5 – selected comparison:
Brendel, Vienna Pro Musica Orch, Mehta (4/68[R]) (VOX) CDX33502

Beethoven

Symphony No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55[a].
Fidelio – Overture, Op 72c[b]
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
LPO Ⓜ LPO0096 (56' • DDD)
Recorded live at the [a]Royal Festival Hall, London, January 22, 2014; [b]Royal Albert Hall, London, September 4 2015



Discreetly attentive to detail yet exalted in expression, a Festival Hall *Pastoral* from this team last January raised expectations that this *Eroica* does not quite meet. An explosive start bodes well. So do divided violins and the kind of narrow-bore brass sound that in recent years has reborn the London Philharmonic as the city's premiere Beethoven orchestra. The second theme, however, is pushed and pulled about in the manner of an idea. A rustic slide in the Scherzo is another such.

Nothing wrong with ideas, of course, except when they draw attention to themselves as such. The symphony's momentum in Jurowski's hands is stifled by a recording that does not do his balancing of the orchestra justice: top-heavy in the

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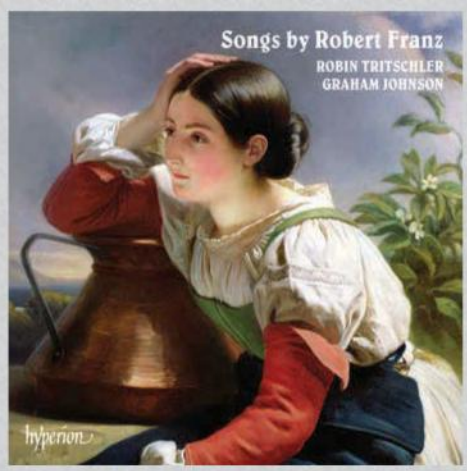
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strings, with more boom than attack to the timpani, it leaves solo winds struggling to cut through. In the same hall, live with the same orchestra (EMI, 11/94), Klaus Tennstedt's vision of the symphony is altogether larger, more vivid, more violent too.

Jurowski bestows great nobility on the Funeral March, running seamlessly into the *maggiore* section and taking its climax in a single exhalation of despair. Elsewhere I was sorry to miss the spirit of recreative conviction that has fired his performances of Mahler's orchestration of the *Eroica*; now that would have made a provocative coupling. Instead, a fiery but irrelevant *Fidelio* Overture is tacked on the end. **Peter Quantrill**

Beethoven · Shostakovich

Beethoven Symphony No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55
Shostakovich Symphony No 10, Op 93
Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra / Michael Sanderling
Sony Classical Ⓑ ② 88985 40884-2 (105' • DDD)



A highly original concept, the subtext: music and dictatorship. As Michael Sanderling himself implies in a persuasive preface to the CD's booklet-note, the aim of this undertaking (these words written specifically with regard to the Shostakovich) is 'to express solidarity with the oppressed and to find a language for their immeasurable suffering'. So far, so understandable. Given that Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor, Beethoven's musical portrait could happily morph into an idealised portrait without reference to any specific individual. As to Shostakovich's brutal 'Stalin' *Allegro* in his Tenth Symphony, that stands as a reflection of evils that are remembered by many who are still living.

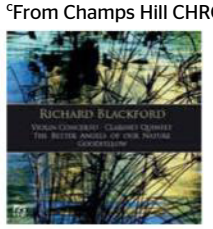
The performances are interesting. Sanderling nudges the *Eroica*'s opening *Allegro con brio* (plus repeat) with some gently underlined emphases. His tempos are swift, his sense of balance impeccable, though I could have done without the conspicuous hairpin towards the end of the first movement's coda (at 16'42"). The 'Marcia funebre' is both dramatic and flexible, though by pushing forwards at key points in the musical argument the way he does Sanderling tends to undermine the sort of gravitas that makes his programming point viable. The Shostakovich works well, but don't expect Stalin's scherzo to pack the sort of savage punch that Ančerl, Mravinsky or Stokowski (in Chicago) brought to it.

Don't misunderstand me, this is a good performance that never falsifies the musical facts. The problem is that neither does it convey the outrage and burning inspiration that caused the music to be written in the first place; neither performance does that.

To be fair to the excellent Michael Sanderling, I can't think of many living conductors who could bring this project off with quite the requisite degree of gravity or intensity. Simon Rattle or Kristjan Järvi, maybe; but who else? A possible solution, at least in terms of CDs, would be to take a conductor who lived through those terrible times (Michael Sanderling was born 14 years after Stalin's death) – Mravinsky, say, Kurt Sanderling (Michael's father) or Rudolf Barshai – and use their recordings to make the point. All three gave us knowingly expressed versions of both symphonies. Michael Sanderling offers warm, structurally sound, well-balanced performances, always musically phrased with well-judged climaxes (especially in the Beethoven) but neither performance rages or protests enough to force us to realise parallels between the two works, or to think in terms of relating either to the troubled world of human affairs. **Rob Cowan**

Blackford

Violin Concerto[a]. Clarinet Quintet[b]. The Better Angels of Our Nature[c]. Goodfellow[d]
[d]**Daniel Pailthorpe** *fl* [cd]**Emily Pailthorpe** *ob* [b]**David Campbell** *cl* [a]**Maria Gajdosova** *vn* [d]**Julian Milford** *pf* [b]**Solstice Quartet** [c]**BBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins; [a]Brno Philharmonic Orchestra / Richard Blackford**
Nimbus Alliance Ⓕ NI6338 (67' • DDD)
[c]From Champs Hill CHRCD116



Having made his reputation in film and television, Richard Blackford (*b*1954) later enjoyed success with several major choral works. Instrumental music has only recently come to the fore in his output, but those works featured here leave little doubt as to his prowess in more abstract genres. Written in just five weeks, the Violin Concerto (2007) combines lithe neoclassicism with, in its central *Andante*, sombre elegance underpinned by a Russian chant that informs its melodic contours. An appealing piece and finely played by Maria Gajdosova; but the Clarinet Quintet (2009) is more engrossing in the way that its three movements outline an ultimately tragic narrative drawn from Caradog Pritchard's novel *Full Moon* – hauntingly realised here.

Inspired by Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2013) moves from a sombre introduction, via an *Allegro* of mounting anxiety, to an interlude in which the Taps fanfare is intoned hauntingly by the oboist before a slow movement whose fraught tranquillity amply evokes the title. Emily Pailthorpe brings poise and eloquence to music written with her artistry in mind, and is no less inside the two pieces of *Goodfellow* (2015). Shakespeare's Puck is duly made focal point of a hectic tour across *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where flute, oboe and piano enact a scenario as engaging as it is whimsical.

Better Angels was previously released on a Champs Hill 'portrait' of Pailthorpe but here finds a rather more effective context. The sound is unexceptionally fine in each case, and this release further consolidates Blackford's standing as an accessible yet never facile composer. **Richard Whitehouse**

Boulez

'Homage à Boulez'
Anthèmes 2[a]. Dérive 2[b]. Dialogue de l'ombre double[c]. Le marteau sans maître[d]. Mémoriale ('...explosante-fixe...' originel)[e]. Messagesquisse[f]
[d]**Hilary Summers** *contr* [e]**Guy Eshed** *fl*
[c]**Jussef Eisa** *cl* [a]**Michael Barenboim** *vn*
[f]**Hassan Moataz El Molla** *vc* [ac]**IRCAM** *elecs*
[bdef]members of the **West-Eastern Divan Orchestra / [b]Daniel Barenboim, [d]Pierre Boulez**
DG Ⓜ ② 479 7160GH2 (142' • DDD)
Recorded live at the [adf]Staatsoper unter den Linden, Berlin, April 4, 2010; Royal Albert Hall, London, July [b]20, [c]21 & [e]23, 2012



There were those who used the occasion of Pierre Boulez's death in 2016 to reiterate the same-old-same-old narrative about the man and his work. Boulez's music was, we were told, frigid and aloof; but listening to these convivial performances of latter-day Boulez works such as *Dérive 2*, *Mémoriale* and *Messagesquisse* makes you wonder quite what all the fuss was about.

Does it make a difference that Daniel Barenboim is in charge, a conductor whose instincts were formed through his fixation with Wilhelm Furtwängler? Certainly Barenboim's take on *Dérive 2*, Boulez's serpentine ensemble work which reached its final version in 2009, is a world away from the aerodynamic, smooth-running version that DG included as a previously unreleased bonus in its 2013 Boulez

Complete Works set. Barenboim and 11 players from his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra add nearly five minutes' duration to Boulez's 43'59". The acoustic idiosyncrasies of the Royal Albert Hall (the performance was recorded during Barenboim's Boulez/Beethoven residency during the 2012 Proms) would certainly have played into Barenboim's tempo choices; but where Boulez offers a serene view of a craggy landscape as though filmed from an aeroplane window, Barenboim clambers over the rock face, kicking stirrups into harmonic landmarks and examining the jewels he unearths.

Performed in this manner, the gestural rhetoric of Boulez's music plays out like an old-school adventure story – material accumulates force and impact, lines are explicitly accompanied, harmonies are leant upon for expressive affect. *Messagesquisse* (1976/77), for solo cello and cello ensemble, is expressed as a jaunty lollipop, complete with big ending; Boulez's last word on the matter, recorded in 2000, again reveals something steelier and more objective.

Michael Barenboim offers an *Anthèmes 2* noticeably less dour than his new studio recording (Accentus, 3/17), while Jussef Eisa transforms *Dialogue de l'ombre double* – which can be unrelentingly morose – into a light-on-its-feet Harlequin's carnival. *Le marteau sans maître* – conducted by Boulez himself in 2010 – throws some period modernist roughage into the mix; another review I read described this performance as more 'flexible' than earlier Boulez performances but I'm not certain I agree. No one's pulling any rhythms around or emoting but, true enough, this is a supremely relaxed and idiomatically confident performance by young musicians, none of whom are scrambling for notes or tripping over the time signatures. Hilary Summers locates herself more as an embedded ensemble member than soloist – and never has Boulez's signature piece sounded more like an exacting sonic analogue of those fantastical René Char poems. **Philip Clark**

Brahms

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 2, Op 83
Sunwook Kim *pf* **Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder**
Hallé Ⓜ ② CDHLL7546 (99' • DDD)



Mark Elder sets the scene with great potency in the D minor First Concerto, conjuring a whole range of emotions, from ire to regret, Sunwook Kim responding with a carefully nuanced entry, the lines moulded with a degree of freedom that gives them personality without being overdone. This is as much Elder's recording as Kim's and the Hallé are on terrific form. If there are times when I missed the impetus of other readings, not least Paul Lewis in his recent version, Kim's way with the first movement's chordal theme (6'36") has a simplicity to it that is very telling. And if this isn't the most headlong of readings, it does have a good sense of ebb and flow, though others make still more contrast between its more inward moments and its bounding energy, not least the masterly Freire.

Elder conjures a rapt mood in the slow movement to which Kim responds with great care – though there were occasions when this felt slightly self-conscious compared to the natural ebb and flow found by Lewis and Hough in their different ways. But Kim brings a fingery brilliance to the main theme of the finale, giving it an appealing vivacity, while the fugal passage (4'55") has a brilliant playfulness to it, which makes for good contrast with the more lyrical passages. They start the build-up to the close quite slowly, replete with zingy trills from Kim, which makes the acceleration to the final bars all the more exciting.

The opening of the B flat Second Concerto is strikingly spacious, the rapturous horn-playing silky smooth, which augurs for a very slow performance; but in fact Kim takes his cadenza-like solo passage markedly faster and when the orchestra returns it's at a bright-eyed pace. However, I did find the movement as a whole somewhat changeable in terms of tempo and there were times when Kim lacked the requisite degree of imperious power (sample from 7'15") that others, such as Freire with the Gewandhaus, possess.

The second movement lives up to its *appassionato* direction and there's a real sense of glee between pianist and orchestral players as they exploit its sheer range, from pounding climaxes down to most delicate writing. The greatest contrast comes from the slow movement, Elder ensuring not only that we admire the cello-playing of Nicholas Trygstad but are also aware of the pizzicato cellos and basses underpinning the texture. There's a particularly lovely oboe solo too. Kim joins the conversation with delicacy and a hushed sense of awe but, like the slow movement of the D minor, sometimes you lose the sense of the bigger picture, so intent is he on revealing every passing beauty. The finale is an unhurriedly elegant affair, Kim and Elder relishing its frequent chamber-musical textures. The Hallé engineers have done a fine job of ensuring Kim is audible even in the biggest climaxes yet not unduly spotlit. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:
Freire, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly
(9/06) (DECC) 478 7637DX2
Hough, Salzburg Mozarteum Orch, M Wigglesworth
(1/14) (HYPE) CDA67961
Piano Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:
Lewis, Swedish RSO, Harding
(5/16) (HARM) HMC90 2191

Brahms · Schumann

Brahms Violin Concerto, Op 77[a]. Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15[b] **Schumann** Piano Quartet, Op 47[c]
[bc]**Emanuel Ax** *pf* [a]**Frank Peter Zimmermann,** [c]**Vesko Eschkenazy** *vns* [c]**Henk Rubingh** *va* [c]**Gregor Horsch** *vc* [ab]**Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Bernard Haitink**
RCO Live Ⓑ ② RCO17001 (116' • DDD/DSD)
Recorded live, [a]March 17-19 & 21, [b]December 15, 17 & 19, 2010; [c]June 20, 2016



This latest issue on the Royal Concertgebouw's own label is a celebration of its honorary conductor, Bernard Haitink. As a Brahms conductor his interpretations have long been admired for their humanity, a quality that radiates through both concertos on this set; they were recorded live in 2010 (Haitink a sprightly 81) and the audience is thankfully silent apart from applause at the end. Haitink's enduring association with this music ensures that every gesture has a naturalness to it, drawing out an oboe line here, a clarinet phrase there. Temperamentally, Frank Peter Zimmermann is on exactly the same wavelength, finding a balance between heart and head, portamentos judiciously applied.

The slow movement is particularly rapt, Zimmerman imbuing the solo line with a sinuous, silky quality. He and Haitink are faster than Gergiev for Znaider, though the latter's sound is so sheerly beautiful that it becomes a delight rather than an indulgence. Jansen is also particularly alluring here, lending the movement a confiding quality. The tempo for the dancing finale on this new set is again just so, Haitink and Zimmermann clearly enjoying its contrast between ebullience and inwardness.

The D minor First Piano Concerto is no less impressive, the opening orchestral *tutti* a mix of strength and poignancy, qualities that Emanuel Ax takes up in his very first entry. Ax is of course no stranger to this repertoire and he conveys a sense of

weightiness and struggle while propelling the music forwards, but never becoming overly hard-driven. In that sense, he has more momentum than Sunwook Kim in his recent recording with Elder (reviewed above on page 32). Ax's slow movement has a solemn yet confiding quality, the pianist caressing the lines without bending them out of shape, the big chordal passage near the end given with real passion. The finale is a tad slower than Kim's but there's so much colour from the orchestral players and so much variety of touch in Ax's playing that the result is constantly engaging; this reading is up there with Freire, Lewis and Hough.

Emanuel Ax is reunited with players of the Concertgebouw for Schumann's Piano Quartet. Again, this has many fine things in it, even if there are starrier string line-ups out there. Ax is the most generous of chamber musicians, retreating into the background to allow the string players to shine. The Scherzo is particularly delicious – hushed and with a breathless quality that contrasts vibrantly with its two Trios. Pacing is unerring throughout, and the ravishing melody introduced by the cello in the *Andante cantabile* here has a quiet nobility, even if there are a few instances of imprecise ensemble in this movement. They bring the work to a close not with the headlong acceleration of some ensembles but with a sense of *joie de vivre* which is very infectious. **Harriet Smith**

Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:
Znaider, VPO, Gergiev (7/09) (RCA) 88697 10336-2
Jansen, S Cecilia Orch, Pappano (1/16) (DECC) 478 8412DH
Piano Concerto No 1 – selected comparisons:
Freire, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly (9/06) (DECC) 478 7637DX2
Hough, Salzburg Mozarteum Orch, M Wigglesworth (1/14) (HYPE) CDA67961
Lewis, Swedish RSO, Harding (5/16) (HARM) HMC90 2191
Kim, Hallé Orch, Elder (6/17) (HALL) CDHLD7546

Bruckner · Wagner

Bruckner Symphony No 4, 'Romantic' (1878/80 version)[a] **Wagner** Parsifal – Good Friday Music[b]
[a]Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra; [b]Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Wilhelm Furtwängler
Praga Digitals Ⓕ PRD/DSD350 130 (78' • DDD/DSD)
Recorded live in [b]Cairo, April 25, 1951; [a]Stuttgart, October 22, 1951



Since Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic took the *Romantic* Symphony on a tour of Germany in the autumn of 1951, there has been a sea change in the matter of playing and thinking about Bruckner. Even recordings of Palestrina and Bach from that time are more recognisable now as representing a distinct and unchanging artefact than this performance of what often sounds, quite simply, like a different piece. Not only in the notes themselves, such as the Scherzo's superfluous modulations and the trumped-up passage into the Trio, or the finale's percussive fixings, brushed and crashed cymbal and all, but more crucially in the symphony's speed and direction of flow.

At least, it's generally assumed these days that the symphony has a flow. Not even Mario Venzago at his most idiosyncratic chops up the outer movements into discrete units of expression – this one rustic, the next visionary – to such disconcerting effect and with so violent a wrench of momentum between each episode. The past really is another country. A more vivid and deeply etched one, to be sure, in the *Andante*'s musings on *Lohengrin*, but lost all the same, like the engravings of Atlantis in my childhood edition of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, and hardly less so in the more nuanced end-of-tour performance a week later, recorded in Munich and made available in decent sound by Orfeo. The Stuttgart concert of October 22 is misdated in the booklet; Praga's remastering is clear and spacious though not noticeably superior to a previous Music & Arts transfer.

The Egypt Radio relay of the Good Friday Music from Cairo is crumbly but incomparably more present, or perhaps that's the performance, which transports us to the realm of a renewed Monsalvat without the strenuous exercise of historical imagination. **Peter Quantrill**

Dutilleux

Symphony No 2, 'Le double'. Mystère de l'instant[a]. Timbres, espace, mouvement
[a]Françoise Rivalland *cimbalom*
Lille National Orchestra / Darrell Ang
Naxos Ⓜ 8 573596 (63' • DDD)



Dutilleux's Second Symphony (1957-59) has not quite achieved standard-repertoire status despite a fair number of commercial recordings. Its distinctive sonorities derive in part from an unusual physical layout in which the main body of players is complemented by a smaller group of 12 drawn from each of the instrumental families, including prominent roles for timpani and harpsichord. The ensembles' intended dialogue – dreamlike and jazz-inflected rather than confrontational – is not always readily apparent on disc. Then again, any attempt to attenuate textures in the interests of clarity risks pushing the expression in a chillier, more conspicuously contemporary direction than the composer intended.

Naxos's busy sound man, Phil Rowlands, gives us an unusually close perspective on the upfront band, sometimes relegating the main orchestra to a subsidiary role but



making it clear that the channel of communication exists. That suits Darrell Ang's forthright approach, generally brisker and brighter than Ludovic Morlot in his acclaimed Seattle sequence of orchestral Dutilleux. The work's mysterious final chord feels a little blunt and workaday in Lille after the disconcerting, distanced transparency achieved by its rival. That said, the award-winning Singaporean, a past artistic director of the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne, secures excellent results, never less than nimble and secure. I'd still opt for Yan Pascal Tortelier on Chandos if what you value in this music is its unaffected prolongation of earlier, not exclusively French symphonic traditions.

In *Mystère de l'instant* (1989), placed last on the disc, Naxos's presentation scores over that of Seattle Symphony Media in tracking the 10 individual movements separately. Chandos did likewise. The work plays continuously but actually consists of brief, disconnected snapshots that 'seize the moment' rather than reaching blurrily for some elusive goal; cimbalom and percussion add piquancy and edge to the strings. In between comes the Van Gogh-inspired *Timbres, espace, mouvement* (1976-78) – now always played with the Interlude added in 1991. This can tax the resources of less prestigious cello sections. No real problems here, although the accompanying splurge of hall resonance doesn't quite ring true. Morlot is broader and marginally cleaner than his competitors.

At bargain price this is a very promising start to a Dutilleux project from the orchestra which in 2014, under erstwhile chief Jean-Claude Casadesus, took the First Symphony as far as Shanghai, having previously recorded it in the 1980s. A remake is one of several items already in the can. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:
BBC PO, YP Tortelier (11/93R, 11/96R, 2/98R) (CHAN) CHAN9853
Seattle SO, Morlot (10/15R, 10/16R) (SSM) SSM1013

Dvořák

Symphonies – No 6, Op 60 B112[a]; No 7, Op 70 B141[b]. Othello, Op 93 B174[a]
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin
LPO Ⓑ ② LPO0095 (99' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, [b]May 27, 2009; [a]February 3, 2016



Yannick Nézet-Séguin is one of the busiest conductors on the international classical music circuit. Criss-crossing between Montreal and Rotterdam, Philadelphia and the Met, he's much in demand. Between 2008 and 2014, he was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and it's with the LPO that he features on this all-Dvořák two-disc release. The Sixth Symphony captures his LPO debut from 2007, while *Othello* and the Seventh were taken from a concert last year.

Nézet-Séguin has a tremendous feel for Dvořák. His conducting was one of the few merits of the Royal Opera's shocker of a *Rusalka* in 2012. There's a tremendous sense of drama in his reading of *Othello*, a terrific symphonic poem. Dvořák had seen Verdi's *Otello* in Prague in 1888 and the shadowy woodwinds and sepulchral basses conjure up the atmosphere of Verdi's Act 4 opening. Nézet-Séguin builds tension and knows when to turn the dramatic screw.

The Sixth Symphony is in sunny D major, shot through with unbuttoned joy. Nézet-Séguin finds the same degree of relaxed happiness as Rafael Kubelík with the Berlin Philharmonic. Like Kubelík, he ignores the first-movement exposition repeat (not a huge loss). If I prefer István Kertész, who observes the repeat, it's because he drives the movement on with greater bucolic energy (and whooping LSO horns). The *Adagio* is lovingly shaped and unhurried, with airy flute and rounded horn tone. The furiant rhythms of the Scherzo are driven along as crisply as Kertész, with some cheeky woodwind solos in the Trio section, while the finale emerges from Brahmsian warmth to something far more boisterous.

Joy and sunlight are far away in the opening to Dvořák's Seventh and here Nézet-Séguin and the LPO strings capture a sense of dark brooding, happily dissipated by the woodwinds. Again, Kertész has a greater sense of purpose in this opening movement, as well as in the *Poco adagio* second, where Nézet-Séguin stretches the long melodies possibly too far. The Scherzo is unforced and the pastoral Trio dances along with a charming lilt. There's an injection of nervous energy in the stormy finale, the LPO brass at their incisive best, until Nézet-Séguin drives the coda hard to a triumphant close. Enthusiastic applause is retained, deservedly so.

Mark Pullinger

Symphonies – selected comparisons:
BPO, Kubelík (DG) 463 158-2GB6
LSO, Kertész (DECC/LOND) 483 0744, 478 6459DC9 or 430 046-2LC6

Falla

El Amor brujo[a]. Fanfare pour une fête. El sombrero de tres picos – Suites
[a]**Esperanza Fernández** *flamenco sngr* **Île-de-France National Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola**
NoMadMusic Ⓕ NMM041 (53' • DDD • T/t)



'It must be very simple in expression, as if Mozart were playing in Spain', Enrique Mazzola tells his players during rehearsals for the Corregidor's music in *El sombrero de tres picos*. It comes as a surprise to discover that his new disc adds five minutes of rehearsal material, all of it remarkably entertaining, to its final track, since neither slip-case nor booklet-notes mention it. Omitting it, however, would have left space for *Sombrero* in its entirety rather than the Suites. Whatever the disc's merits, there is a sense of a missed opportunity.

Mazzola insists his approach is personal: his mother, a dancer, regularly performed *El Amor brujo* in Barcelona when he was young, he tells us; Falla's ballets were the sounds of his childhood, though now he finds in them 'so much Stravinsky, so much Ravel'. The influences loom large in his treatment of the slashing rhythms of *El Amor brujo*'s 'Canción del amor dolido' and the sensual undulations of its 'Pantomima'. *Sombrero* is gracious, suave, a bit low-key. One appreciates his comment about Mozart: the philandering Corregidor sounds strikingly sincere here rather than caricatured.

Occasionally, he pushes hard. The 'Ritual Fire Dance' seems hectic when placed beside Dutoit's measured, sinister account with his Montreal Symphony. Mazzola's orchestra is clean, bright, very virtuoso. But in *Sombrero* some will prefer the greater weight of Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos's Philharmonia for EMI. Mazzola's vocalist is Esperanza Fernández, a flamenco singer rather than the more usual mezzo, persuasively earthy, though 'Canción del fuego fátuo' lies high. The brief *Fanfare pour une fête*, meanwhile, is tacked on to *El Amor brujo* as an additional prelude. It's all hugely enjoyable, but Dutoit's comparable coupling, with *Sombrero* complete, is still to be preferred.

Tim Ashley

El Amor brujo, El sombrero de tres picos – selected comparison:
Dutoit (8/83) (DECC) 410 008-2DH
El sombrero de tres picos – selected comparison:
Frühbeck de Burgos (11/64R, 2/76R) (WARN) 237595-2



Viviane Chassot finds 'ample opportunity to show off her technique' in Haydn's keyboard concertos

Haydn

Keyboard Concertos – HobXVIII:3; HobXVIII:4; HobXVIII:7; HobXVIII:11

Viviane Chassot *accordion*

Basel Chamber Orchestra

Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 40745-2 (74' • DDD)



What could be the possible reason for recording Haydn's keyboard concertos on an accordion? In this case, the easy answer is that it's the virtuosity of the Swiss accordionist Viviane Chassot. And, frankly, you could play this music on the swanee whistle and kazoo and it would lose not an iota, not one whit of its playfulness and charm.

Chassot is unfazed by the fingery demands of Haydn's fast movements; and if her scalic runs are perhaps a little lumpier than, say, the crystalline evenness of Leif Ove Andsnes (EMI/Warner, 4/00), it's because of the properties of the instrument, and it really doesn't detract from the music at all. You also hear a little of the button action, which suggests that Chassot's accordion might have been spotlit a touch in the microphone set-up.

The disc opens with the most famous of these works, the D major Concerto No 11, offering Chassot ample opportunity to show off her technique, especially in the Hungarianisms of the finale. A change of perspective compensates for the absence of oboes and horns in the earlier G major (No 4) and F major (No 3) works, thereby enriching the strings (4.4.2.2.1) in the sound picture. The F major Organ Concerto (No 7) is considered almost certainly not to be by Haydn but it too displays all the harmonic and melodic mores of the 1760s.

You may feel that the mood drifts from Enlightenment Vienna to French café culture in the cadenzas but Haydn left none of his own, and Chassot makes ingenious use of the prevailing motifs in her creations. I'm glad to have heard this; and if hearing Haydn's concertos on the squeezebox would make your life complete, you'll not find a better disc. **David Threasher**

Haydn

Symphonies – No 53, 'L'Impériale'[a]; No 64, 'Tempora mutantur'[b]; No 96, 'Miracle'[a]

The Oregon Symphony Orchestra / Carlos Kalmar

Pentatone Ⓕ PTC5186 612 (62' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, OR, [b]2013, [a]2016



Carlos Kalmar chooses three named symphonies for a Haydn disc with the Portland-based orchestra of which he has been music director for nearly a decade and a half. Judging from these performances, taken live, Oregon's Haydn lovers are well looked after by the Uruguayan but Austrian-trained conductor.

Kalmar ideally encapsulates and characterises each symphony, locating the enigma at the heart of *Tempora mutantur*, with its wonky, scatter-brained themes, as well as the majesty of *L'Impériale* and the *Miracle*. Woodwind solos are shaped well (there's a wonderful oboe solo leading into the *Miracle*'s *Allegro*), while the horns that form the core of *L'Impériale*'s sound world are given space to make their mark. The leader, too, imparts an *echt* Viennese lilt to the Trio of the *Miracle*'s Minuet. For those to whom such things matter, Kalmar opts for 'Finale A' (as designated in the Philharmonia score) in No 53.

These are modern-instrument performances with occasional audience noise but no applause. The playing and the

intelligence behind the conducting are of a standard to make this far more than a *souvenir d'occasion*. Perhaps less than a decade ago that would have made this a top recommendation if the (unique, I think) coupling appealed. However, since then we've been taught new ways of playing and hearing Haydn by the likes of Thomas Fey, Marc Minkowski, Ottavio Dantone and Giovanni Antonini. The latter will get round to all these symphonies over the next 15 years (*Tempora mutantur* is already on his third volume – Alpha, 5/17). But this is a fine fill-in till then.

David Threasher

DH Johnson

'Orchestral Music, Vol 1'

Symphony No 9, Op 295. Motet, Op 257 No 2. Communion Antiphon No 14, 'St Boniface, Whitechapel', Op 359

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Paul Mann

Toccata Classics Ⓕ TOCC0393 (68' • DDD)



As the high opus numbers of these three works, all written between 2009 and 2016, betray, David Hackbridge Johnson (*b*1963) – composer, performer, sometime record producer, teacher – has been busy. The three purely orchestral works recorded here are not just his first to appear on disc, they are – with one small exception – the first orchestral works of his to be performed at all. Johnson's Brian-like doggedness in creating despite the indifference of the outside world is unusual; but what is so astonishing is not his ambition in attempting such large, big-boned structures (Motet No 2 runs to 13 action-packed minutes) but that he possesses the compositional technique to achieve them so completely.

The Ninth Symphony (2012) opens with tremendous sweep and power, like a (highly personal) fusion of Elgar and Vermeulen, sustained compellingly throughout this quarter-hour-long span. The ensuing set of variations and compound-form finale are built on an equivalent scale. Each concludes in a riveting passacaglia, only the second fully resolving. This is a profound, complex and visionary utterance, not easy listening, but repays living with.

There are fleeting reminiscences of other composers, telling in providing a context for Johnson's music to operate within but no more. The music always sounds like the product of one acute musical mind, the lovely Communion Antiphon No 14 (2016), evoking the chimes of St Boniface, Whitechapel, no less than the symphony. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra audibly believe in the music in three terrific performances. Conductor Paul Mann's unequivocal acclaim for the works is manifest in every bar. With excellent sound, available on disc or FLAC, hi-res and MP3 downloads, this is strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

L Koželuch

'Symphonies, Vol 1'

Symphonies: Op 22 – No 1, PosK I:3; No 3, PosK I:5; Op 24 – No 1, PosK I:6; No 2, PosK I:7

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice / Marek Štilec

Naxos Ⓜ 8 573627 (77' • DDD)



Naxos's 'Czech Masters in Vienna' series turns to Leopold Koželuch (1747-1818), a composer in whom some interest has been shown of late, with recordings of the piano sonatas by Kemp English (Grand Piano) and a trio of concertos by Howard Shelley (Hyperion, 1/17). Matthias Bamert also recorded three symphonies including the two Op 22 works here in 1998 (Chandos). Expect something that sounds a little like a cross between Haydn and Mozart (indeed, how could it not?) but without the tautness of argument of the former or the heart-tugging lyricism of the latter.

That's not to damn Koželuch without faint praise, though. He was clearly a competent and imaginative composer, fully in control of structure and with a personal approach to harmony (the booklet blurb likens his harmonic twists to early Schubert but it's not quite as individual as his two main Viennese contemporaries). He fell under the spell of *Sturm und Drang* too in the G minor Symphony (No 5 in Milan Poštolka's catalogue) and in hefty parts of the C major (No 6), although without quite developing the propulsive tension of Haydn. He can spin a tune, too, in slow movements, with some piquant touches of orchestration.

But there's a reason why we listen to Haydn and Mozart and not to Koželuch and hundreds of other *Kleinmeister* of the period – these symphonies mainly date from the 1780s – and that's the matter of genius. Nevertheless, projects such as this and the ones namechecked above are worthwhile for filling in our knowledge of the milieu in which the greats worked, the music they heard and the influences they shared. There are 11 symphonies according to *The New Grove* and thus we can look forward to a couple more discs of the vivid, well-argued and colourful music of Leopold Koželuch. **David Threasher**

Legrand

Piano Concerto[a]. Cello Concerto[b]

[b]**Henri Demarquette** *vc* [a]**Michel Legrand** *pf* **Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra / Mikko Franck**

Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 39372-2 (75' • DDD)



I have long adored the songs and admired the talent of Michel Legrand, inflected as it is with a jazzer's free-ranging melodies and oblique harmonies – but the devilish inventiveness of these concert pieces took even me by surprise. The fact is that they don't really sound like anyone else, and even if you were to reach for comparisons and describe the first movement of the Piano Concerto as a little like the Ravel G major on speed you still wouldn't fully convey its distinctive musical character.

It's a piece in a hurry all right – the first-movement toccata is born of a jazzer's feverish note-spinning (Legrand is, as we know, a mean pianist) but with a classicist's precision. But suddenly in sweeps one of those lush film noir-ish themes so beloved of Legrand and all at once it's personal. In that regard you'd expect a song, or at least a songfulness, to emerge from the slow movement, and it does – a blue, oblique kind of tune, the kind of tune that would never need words. Again, all the harmonic progressions sound like they're happening in the moment and for one time only – the art that conceals art and springs deception – and there are always surprises in store: a sudden burst of piano in the trenchant finale which sounds like a fleeting homage to Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (panic in the puppeteer's booth) and a thrilling apotheosis which comes on strong like Gershwin rhapsodising in black. Both were Boulanger students, of course.

In some ways the Cello Concerto (written first) is even more innovative. A driven brilliance still alternates with aching nostalgia, the evolutionary lyric ideas still spun in such a way as to belie that they have been written down, but there is a ruminative quality especially well suited to the cello – the piece was commissioned by the excellent cellist who performs it here, Henri Demarquette – and in the final section of the piece, a long lament entitled *Le plus que lent*, it becomes almost a confessional. Legrand's love of theatre

does not desert him, either. Just prior to this final movement he has the conductor slip from podium to piano (the instrument sits there unplayed for the rest of the piece) to accompany the soloist in a brief 'aside' – a three-minute sonata within the concerto, a musical joke sprung with composerly sophistication. **Edward Seckerson**

Mahler

Symphony No 3

Gerhild Romberger *contr* **Cantemus Children's Choir; Bavarian Radio Chorus; Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer**

Channel Classics Ⓜ ② SACD CCSSA38817

(96' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Here for once is a Mahler symphony release that feels different from the outset. Jared Sacks and his colleagues at Channel Classics are famous for setting high technical standards and they surpass their previous efforts here. I doubt whether there has ever been a more precisely focused, more sheerly beautiful recording of any Mahler work. There is perhaps a downside. The sound, like Iván Fischer's interpretation, avoids hard edges and apocalyptic excess, leading to a certain loss of peripheral vision. Deryck Cooke once described the first movement of the Third as 'the most original and flabbergasting thing Mahler ever conceived'. But how vulgar ought it to sound? Reluctant to parade its roughest edges and disinclined to hurry, Fischer instead elicits a range of pristine, jewel-like colour that leaves its fabric refreshed.

While the consensual yet individualistic grain of Fischer's music-making presents parallels with Claudio Abbado's late work in Lucerne, his rubato is more insistent: Leonard Bernstein without the angst. His finale can boast neither the instantaneous rapture of the former nor the self-conscious solemnity of the latter, in spite of which the argument is transformed, lightened, some will say liberated in his hands. Those who feel that Mahler miscalculated the insistent grandeur of his endings will appreciate the way Fischer, like Abbado, makes the texture less brazen at the close, muffling the timpani into the bargain. Those who do not may also resist the manner in which Fischer defangs the sweatier, more demotic episodes of the first movement despite a sometimes breathtaking variety of affect.

The rural idyll is most potent and incontrovertibly 'right' in the inner movements, all maximally transparent. Difficult to imagine the avowedly summery third and its distanced solos being bettered any time soon. If Gerhild Romberger seems rather forwardly balanced in the Friedrich Nietzsche setting, her robust delivery is presumably meant to fit with the outdoors quality of the rest. She also has to contend with the slurred cries of the night-bird as suggested by the woodwind's *hinaufziehen* ('pull up') markings. After that the choral contributions maintain an exalted standard without sounding overly genteel.

Why nitpick? You'd have to be hypercritical indeed not to rejoice in the appearance of a studio recording made the old-fashioned way with exquisite care, multiple takes and not a trace of routine in the playing. The only disappointment is that there can't be much Mahler left to come from this source. The Eighth would seem to be incompatible with both the conductor's angle on the composer and the economic constraints under which his orchestra must operate. He has not, as far as I know, tackled Cooke's performing version of the Tenth. This Third is a must-have. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

New York PO, Bernstein (12/62[R]) (SONY) 88697 94333-2

Lucerne Fest Orch, Abbado (MEDI) DVD *205 6338;* Blu-ray *205 6334*



Mendelssohn

Symphonies – No 1, Op 11; No 3, 'Scottish', Op 56
NDR Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Manze
Pentatone Ⓕ PTC5186 595 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Two litmus tests in any performance of Mendelssohn's glorious *Scottish* Symphony are the *Adagio* third movement and the final peroration. Noting the composer's swift metronome markings, here and elsewhere, Andrew Manze comes close to my ideal in both. Familiar charges of over-sweetness and Victorian pomposity seem more than usually absurd. Like Thomas Fey (6/10) and Roger Norrington (both on Hänssler) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt (Warner, 5/92), Manze encourages his excellent modern-instrument orchestra to play with a period lightness, paring down the string tone (vibrato sparingly but expressively applied) and giving close attention to wind detail and internal balance. The *Adagio*, taken at a flowing but flexible tempo, has a chaste beauty, the violin melody eloquently sung yet with Mendelssohn's prescribed bowing, dynamics and accents precisely observed – a world away from the undifferentiated *sostenuto* of many older conductors. As to the symphony's 'problematic' coda, after listening to Manze's mounting exhilaration, culminating in a final euphoric blaze, you might wonder what all the fuss was about.

From the bardic opening theme, given a properly bleak edge (oboes and horns, rather than divided violas, to the fore), Manze and his players always ensure maximum clarity in the outer movements' often dense textures. Time and again in the *tuttis* I registered wind detail I had not noticed before. Crucially, too, the violins are separated left and right, with obvious dividends in the deliciously fleet, gamesome Scherzo (here a Highland *Midsummer Night's Dream*) and the fugal sparrings of the finale, where Manze emphasises delicacy over tartan bellicosity. In the opening *Allegro* Mendelssohn's hushed, tense *un poco agitato* is nicely caught (the deep clarinet more than usually audible in the main theme), though other conductors, including Harnoncourt, have managed the subsequent tempo changes more subtly. That said, there are many felicities, not least the mysterious sense of distancing as the development ebbs and the veiled, truly *pianissimo* cello descant at the recapitulation.

For its *echt* Mendelssohnian combination of pace, precision, flexibility and transparency, Manze's performance joins Norrington, Dohnányi (Decca, 12/87), the more abrasive Fey and the Romantically inclined Harnoncourt on my *Scottish* short list. Energy, textural clarity and some fabulous woodwind-playing are also hallmarks of the Mozart-meets-Weber First Symphony, composed a year before the miraculous Octet. Manze's rugged, slower-than-expected tempo for the *Allegro molto* minuet underlines Mendelssohn's debt to Mozart's G minor Symphony, No 40 (almost a case of 'call the lawyers'). Floating the melody across the bar line, the players beautifully capture the *Andante*'s mingled solemnity and innocence, while the lissom *divisi* violins are again shown to advantage in finale's scurrying fugal development.
Richard Wigmore

Nenov

Piano Concerto. Ballade No 2
Ivo Varbanov *pf*
Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Emil Tabakov
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68205 (65' • DDD)



Before tackling the music and recording, I should like to express my admiration for Ivo Varbanov, the Bulgarian London-based pianist behind this project. Having been forced to abandon performing between 2009 and 2012 due to leukaemia, he has returned to the concert platform and, in order to let us hear the music of his fellow countryman for the first time on a commercial recording, commissioned the printed parts and scores for these two works, as they remain unpublished and handwritten. Dimitar Nenov (1901-53), a name unknown to many of us in the West, was, to quote the booklet (which also outlines the reasons for his obscurity), 'a polymath of rare magnitude', a pianist, composer, architect (he designed several railway stations), pedagogue, radio producer and the founder of Bulgaria's first radio orchestra (1930). An interesting figure.

Whether or not you find his Piano Concerto 'for piano and large orchestra' equally interesting must be a matter of personal taste. Composed in 1932-36, its three sections are cast in one continuous movement. Stylistically, it takes from the Romantic symphonic concerto tradition while dipping into polymodal and polytonal areas, sound clusters, percussive effects, jazz and folk song, the whole work constructed in a single overarching sonata form. Throughout its 45 minutes' duration, the concerto repeatedly summoned in my mind – and I mean this as a compliment – images of film noir, of creepy 1940s psychological thrillers with music by someone like Roy Webb. The piano-writing, for the most part, is of the brutal stamina-sapping kind that requires little subtlety or tonal colouring. The frequent climactic *tuttis*, especially that in the middle of the central section, pack speaker-crunching punches.

The Ballade No 2 (1943) evokes a similar response. Nenov, though no melodist and to whom economy of means is a foreign concept, is hardly short of ideas. Nearly 22 minutes in length and in an apparently rhapsodic form – where, you ask, will Nenov take us next? – it's a strangely compelling journey. Once you get on, it's hard to get off. How often I should like to repeat the journey is a moot point.
Jeremy Nicholas

Nielsen

Flute Concerto[a]. Clarinet Concerto[b]. Aladdin Suite
[a]Samuel Coles *fl* / **[b]Mark van de Wiel** *cl*
Philharmonia Orchestra / Paavo Järvi
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD477 (69' • DDD)
[ab]Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, [a]November 19, 2015; [b]May 19, 2016



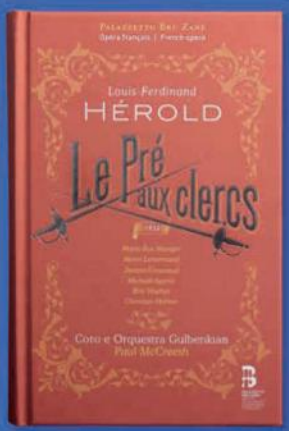
Paavo Järvi presides over a splendidly stylish and invigorating Nielsen anthology featuring the Philharmonia at the top of its game throughout. Both concerto performances emanate from concerts at London's Royal Festival Hall and deserve the warmest plaudits.

The orchestra's principal clarinet, Mark van de Wiel, genuinely shines in the sparky 1928 essay that Nielsen wrote for his friend Aage Oxenvad, finding just the right balance between tenderness and irascibility, while also displaying a technical mastery, subtly variegated tone and intrepid range of dynamic. (There's also an excellent contribution from the snare drum, which has an important sparring role.) Composed in 1926 and revised the following January, the Flute Concerto bears a dedication to Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, who made a matchless recording of it in April 1954 with Thomas Jensen and the Danish State RSO for Decca (12/54, now restored on Australian Eloquence). Here, too, the Philharmonia's principal flute, Samuel Coles, proves a

PALAZZETTO BRU ZANE

SERIES OF CD-BOOKS
'FRENCH OPERA'

Le Pré aux clercs (1832)
Louis-Ferdinand Hérold



Coro e Orquestra Gulbenkian
Paul McCreesh *conductor*

with Marie-Ève Munger,
Marie Lenormand, Jeanne Crousaud,
Michael Spyres, Éric Huchet,
Christian Helmer

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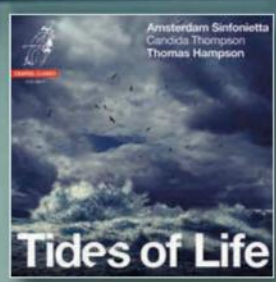
MAHLER
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Iván Fischer
Budapest Festival Orchestra
ccs sa 38817

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Hamlet Piano Trio



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Brass United
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'A wide variety of new pieces and arrangements for brass quintet, all related in some way to dance and folk music'.
Brass United

distribution in UK: RSK Entertainment info@rskentertainment.co.uk
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scrupulously sensitive and marvellously quick-witted protagonist, and he enjoys exemplary support from his colleagues under Järvi's attentive lead.

Last comes a strongly characterised reading (set down in Southwark's Henry Wood Hall) of the orchestral suite from Nielsen's incidental score to the 1919 Copenhagen revival of Adam Oehlenschläger's adaptation of *Aladdin*. Not all of Järvi's tempos are conventional but the orchestral playing is admirable and felicitous touches abound: the 'Chinese Dance' has a delectable point and friskiness about it, while the exuberant concluding 'Negro Dance' fairly bounds along.

First-rate annotation (Andrew Mellor) and production values (Andrew Cornall and Jonathan Stokes) add to the attractions of a thoroughly recommendable release.

Andrew Achenbach

Ravel

Daphnis et Chloé

Ensemble Aedes; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMM90 5280 (55' • DDD)



Diaghilev's initial reaction to *Daphnis et Chloé*, documented in Jean-François Monnard's excellent booklet-note, was 'Ravel, it is a masterpiece, but it is not a ballet. It is a painting of a ballet.' It certainly is a masterpiece and Ravel's *symphonie chorégraphique* continues Les Siècles' period-instrument explorations of the Ballets Russes repertoire following its excellent recordings of the three Stravinsky ballets (Actes Sud, 12/11, 9/14). Recorded in concert from as many as seven different venues – including Paris's Philharmonie, Hamburg's Laeiszhalle and Snape Maltings – it marks a terrific debut on the Harmonia Mundi label.

We don't know what the orchestral sound was like at its 1912 Paris premiere… but many listeners will be familiar with the 1959 LSO recording by the original conductor, Pierre Monteux, long a treasure of the Decca catalogue. Comparisons are instructive. Les Siècles' French-built woodwind and brass instruments from the early 20th century (documented in the booklet) provide greater tonal sweetness, especially the Selmer trumpets, which don't dominate textures as much as the incisive LSO brass. Lean gut strings achieve feathery lightness. The 'Danse guerrière' is terrific, particularly the sinuous clarinet, juicy contrabassoon and dusky alto flute. In the famous 'Lever du jour', the key clatter of the woodwinds among the chirruping detracts a touch from the magic, the close recording possibly trying to negate the acoustical differences between the venues. Marion Ralincourt, playing a Louis Lot flute with less vibrato than her LSO counterpart, beguiles in the 'Danse de Lycéion' and is both seductive and coquettish in the Syrinx Pantomime episode.

François-Xavier Roth teases a much more expansive opening than Monteux, a slow burn leading to an ecstatic first choral entry. He is often more languorous, the performance nearly four minutes slower than the Decca account. However, Roth attacks the 'Danse guerrière' with more vim and also whips up a faster bacchanalian finale. With fine choral contributions from the Ensemble Aedes, this new recording is highly recommended.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison:

LSO, Monteux (12/59R, 9/96R) (DECC) 475 7525DOR

Ravel · Falla

Falla Noches en los jardines de España

Ravel Piano Concertos – in G; for the Left Hand

Steven Osborne *pf* **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot**

Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68148 (63' • DDD)



Martha Argerich's Ravel G major was for so long a reference recording that it's easy to forget how idiosyncratic it actually is. I wouldn't actually blame anyone who found it too garish in its colouring, with its volatility giving diminishing returns and its rubato too predictably *appassionato* for a sensibility as dapper as Ravel's. Such a person might well find exactly what they want in Steven Osborne's account, which is masterful in its own way but essentially self-effacing.

Where is the dividing line between understatement and lack of character? Nowhere objective, to be sure. But the question is provoked by an opening movement in which the piano solos are so modestly inflected and the shadings so pastel-pale as to give an impression of standoffishness. The slow movement is again undeniably fluent and unfussy, but with a certain samey-ness in the sound that doesn't hold the attention – or not mine, anyway. Whatever the performance may lack, it's certainly not dash and agility, as the spick-and-span *Presto* finale shows in abundance. But once you turn to Aimard or Lortie, for example, you hear exactly how the Ravel idiom need not be compromised by stronger soloistic presence and a broader range of touch and colour.

It was perhaps unfortunate that I listened to the Left-Hand Concerto only days after an electrifying live account from Jean-Efflam Bavouzet at the Bridgewater Hall. By comparison the new recording feels studio-bound, with insufficient tension, imagination and daredevilry. To be sure, sensitive touches abound in Osborne's playing, but the rhetorical projection is again insufficient to seize or hold the attention.

The Falla I enjoyed rather more, perhaps partly through having fewer invidious comparisons in mind. Even so, I wouldn't say that atmosphere is its strongest point, and I have to confess that time dragged a little, especially in the outer movements, mainly because the contours are never sufficiently sharply profiled.

I do wonder whether the recording quality shouldn't shoulder some of the blame. Throughout the disc the sound lacks spaciousness, bloom and blend, while orchestral *fortissimos* need more depth of string tone and tend to sound congested and blaring. **David Fanning**

Ravel Concertos – selected comparisons:

Lortie, LSO, Frühbeck de Burgos (1/90) (CHAN) CHAN8773

Aimard, Cleveland Orch, Boulez (10/10) (DG) 477 8770GH

Concerto in G – selected comparison:

Argerich, BPO, Abbado (2/68R) (DG) 447 438-2GOR

See The Musician & the Score on page 46

Saint-Saëns

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 17; No 2, Op 22. Allegro appassionato, Op 70

Romain Descharmes *pf*

Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Marc Soustrot

Naxos Ⓜ 8 573476 (58' • DDD)



The striking originality of the D major First Concerto, its exuberant outer movements bursting with youthful zest and its hauntingly atmospheric second movement with its prescient passages of Ravel, make it an unjustly neglected work that deserves far more attention from pianists and conductors. It was written when Saint-Saëns was in his early twenties, qualifying – late as this was in 1858 – as the earliest piano concerto written by a major French composer.

Were I hearing the work for the first time through this recording, I would think

it money well spent: a young(ish) French pianist (*b*1980) with a polished technique and an innate affinity with his countryman's idiom, well recorded, with first-class accompaniment from the genial Marc Soustrot. It is only when you turn to certain other versions that the reservations set in. My benchmarks are Hough on Hyperion and Darré on EMI (if you can track it down). Both adopt brisker tempos, especially Darré in the finale who, more than a minute faster than Descharmes, embraces Saint-Saëns's *con fuoco* with enthusiasm. Everywhere, everything burns just that bit more brightly.

The same slight reticence is on show in the popular G minor Second Concerto. Saint-Saëns's writing is acutely and carefully observed, the Scherzo and *Presto* movements are given more breathing space and, with that, a little more dignity than on some rival versions. It is a convincing alternative view, but not one I find as compelling as Benjamin Grosvenor's (Decca).

The only other version of No 1 currently available on a single disc comes from Norika Ogawa on BIS. She also couples it with No 2 but has the Suite in D for orchestra, Op 49, as the filler. Otherwise you must avail yourself of a set of all five concertos. So it may be Naxos's attractive price and the unusual filler of the *Allegro appassionato* that are the determining factors, even if the disc does last a relatively short 58'22".

Jeremy Nicholas

Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2 – selected comparisons:
Hough, CBSO, Oramo (11/01) (HYPE) CDA67331/2
Ogawa, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Kantorow (BIS) BIS-CD1040
Piano Concertos No 2 – selected comparison:
Grosvenor, RLPO, Judd (11/12) (DECC) 478 3527DH

Sibelius

Symphonies – No 1, Op 39; No 6, Op 104
BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Thomas Søndergård
Linn Ⓕ CKD502 (66' • DDD)



The solo clarinet that stands on the threshold of Sibelius's symphonic journey is quite simply the palest, chilliest, loneliest sound in the world. Thomas Søndergård has a nose for such things and his Sibelius – as we have already heard in the first release of the series coupling the Second and Seventh Symphonies (3/15) – is nothing if not atmospheric.

There are distinct pluses and minuses. I like the way Søndergård keeps all the surfaces unvarnished and the woodwind voices keen and folksy. The plain-speaking quality makes for a really elemental sound, with climaxes in the First Symphony's first movement craggy and rough-hewn. There is a transparency, too, with the prominence of inner parts illuminating the harmony in interesting ways – and again, in the second movement, a special remoteness as the dynamics become withdrawn in the closing pages. It's a uniquely Sibelian sound all right and, as such, like no other – and we are a world apart from the super-plushness of some accounts one could mention, the wholly inappropriate Rattle/Berlin Philharmonic recording for one.

But against all this one must measure a certain sluggishness in rhythmic matters and passage after passage where Søndergård's response and that of the excellent BBC National Orchestra of Wales might be cleaner, tighter, more emphatic. The scherzos of both symphonies are oddly deliberate, with that of the First (*Allegro*?) like an ungainly folk dance (for polar bears?) where the timpani feel puddingy and lacking crispness. Likewise the *Poco vivace* of the Sixth – very *poco* – is almost perversely the wrong side of propulsive. But then again Søndergård does not refine the Sixth out

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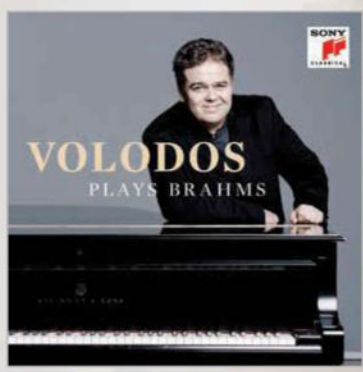


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Amy Dickson
Glass

"Highly nuanced and skilful interpretations"
Gramophone

"It is, quite literally, a breath-taking performance" **BBC Music Magazine**



1 CD / 8887513019 2

Arcadi Volodos
Volodos Plays Brahms

Gramophone Recording of the Month

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of recognition – there is still, for all the concision and austere beauty, an avoidance of preciousness. And when storm clouds pass fleetingly over the landscape at the close of the first movement the effect is more than a little unsettling.

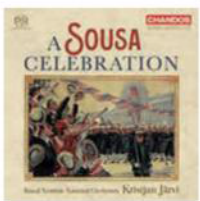
So a very personal response to this music and one that accentuates its strangeness, its elusiveness. It won't be to everyone's taste, though, and much as I am pleased to take this voyage of discovery with Søndergård, I've a feeling I won't be alone in craving on occasions a keener profile, sharper relief and greater rhythmic dynamism.

Edward Seckerson

Selected comparison:
BPO, Rattle (9/15) (BPH) BPHR150071

Sousa

'A Sousa Celebration'
El Capitan – Waltzes; March. The Dwellers of the Western World. The Gliding Girl. Humoresque on 'Look for the silver lining'. Humoresque on 'Swanee'. The Invincible Eagle. The Irish Dragoon – Overture; Circus Galop. The Liberty Bell. Nymphalin. On Wings of Lightning. Sandalphon. Semper fidelis. The Stars and Stripes Forever. The Thunderer. The Washington Post
Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi
Chandos Ⓕ CHSA5182 (68' • DDD/DSD)



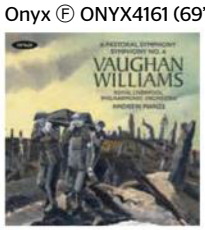
I have always had a soft spot for Sousa. A Columbia 78 in my parent's collection was an early favourite – *The Liberty Bell* on one side, *The Washington Post* on the other – which I played probably a little too often as a six-year-old. My father eventually sat on it. I like to think it was an accident. It was Sousa's view that 'a march should make a man with a wooden leg step out', and no one has done that more successfully, an achievement not always acknowledged as generously as it is might be in some quarters (the 1951 Sackville-West/Shawe-Taylor *Record Guide* omits Sousa completely).

The best of Sousa's marches (he wrote 139 of them) cannot help but lift the spirits and put a smile on your face. So why does this superbly recorded disc often fail to do that? *The Washington Post* which opens the disc and *The Stars and Stripes Forever* which closes it are taken at a frantic pace that not even the fittest US marine could march to. Järvi turns them into screamers, devoid of their essential confident swagger, and quite different in character to Sousa's own 1929 recording and those made by his band in 1901 and 1903 conducted by Sousa's trombone soloist Arthur Pryor; the off-key bell stroke in *The Liberty Bell* has an unintended (?) comedic effect.

It was sensible not to restrict the disc to a succession of marches, but the various waltzes and other numbers chosen to offer a contrast only underline Sousa's paucity of inspiration away from the parade ground. The Humoresques on 'Swanee' and 'Look for the silver lining', *Nymphalin* and *The Gliding Girl* are eminently missable. Splendidly rousing versions of *The Thunderer*, *The Invincible Eagle*, *El Capitan* and *Semper fidelis* are nearly enough to redeem proceedings, with the suite *The Dwellers of the Western World* (12'31") the only real discovery worth celebrating. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Vaughan Williams

Symphonies – No 3, 'A Pastoral Symphony'[a]; No 4
[a]**Andrew Staples** *ten* **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Manze**
Onyx Ⓕ ONYX4161 (69' • DDD)



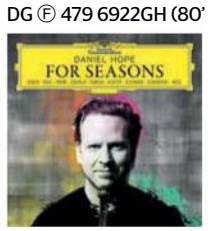
Andrew Manze takes a markedly more objective view of RVW's *A Pastoral Symphony* than most of his rival interpreters on disc. Prospective purchasers can rest assured that the RLPO responds with breathtaking composure throughout, countless strands of texture and flecks of detail are laid bare with almost forensic clarity, and in the second movement and finale respectively there are immaculate contributions from Rhys Owens (playing a natural trumpet) and (as sanctioned in the score) tenor Andrew Staples. If only the finished article stirred me more! Who knows, perhaps the clinical sound is partly to blame; but the slumbering tragedy, transcendental awe and piercing anguish that suffuse this illimitably moving and sublimely compassionate creation seldom register here, and there's too little overall that either quickens the pulse or tugs at the heartstrings. In other words, I found this an altogether less involving experience than Elder's wondrously organic and glowingly rapt Hallé version (2/15), to say nothing of those distinguished forebears from Haitink, Handley, Previn and Boult (his 1953 Decca recording).

The comparatively close-set balance is better suited to the rugged Fourth Symphony, though in the slow movement I'd have preferred greater *cantabile* warmth from the strings (always a Boult trademark). Certainly, Manze has the RLPO on its toes in an athletic, commendably spick-and-span reading which is as faithful to the letter of the score as it is rhythmically spry. What's lacking is that fiery temperament you hear in such abundance on those astoundingly elemental, unforgettably edge-of-seat displays under the composer himself and Barbirolli (both with the BBC SO, from 1937 and 1950 respectively). Nor does Manze's conception evince the symphonic sinew or cumulative tension one encounters with, say, Mitropoulos, Bernstein, Berglund, Handley, Haitink, Oundjian or Ryan Wigglesworth (in a thrilling concert relay with the LPO from May 2013). Still, a perfectly decent Fourth, but for me the oddly detached performance of its bedfellow remains a stumbling block; and, unless you're irrevocably committed to acquiring Manze's cycle, I can only advise caution.

Andrew Achenbach

'For Seasons'

Aphex Twin Avril 14th **JS Bach** Cantata No 115 – Bete aber auch dabei **Brahms** Wiegenlied, Op 49 No 4 **Frahm** Ambre **C Gonzales** Les doutes d'août. Wintermezzo **Molter** Concerto pastorale – Aria II **Rameau** Les Indes galantes – Danse des sauvages **Richter** Recomposed – Spring 1 **Schumann** Dichterliebe, Op 48 – Am leuchtenden Somermorgen **Tchaikovsky** The Seasons, Op 37*bis* – June **Traditional** Amazing Grace **Vivaldi** The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4 **Weill** Knickerbocker Holiday – September Song **Daniel Hope** *vn* **Zurich Chamber Orchestra** with **Anna Lucia Richter** *sop* **Claudio Bohórquez** *vc* **Christoph Anacker** *db* **Jacques Ammon, Chilly Gonzales** *pf* **Naoki Kitaya** *org* **Jane Berthe** *hp* **Christian Badzura** *bass synth* **Dom Bouffard** *elec gtr* **Michael Metzler** *perc* **Kaiser Quartet**
DG Ⓕ 479 6922GH (80' • DDD)



Daniel Hope's 'For Seasons' album is struggling to be high-concept but much of the music that supports the concept is insipid and dull. The bulk of the disc is devoted to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, recorded in a sprightly, clean, conventional manner with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra. There's not really any pressing need for another version of these works, with hundreds already in the catalogue and this new one not particularly insightful or innovative. But it does follow up on an earlier Hope project, the 'recomposition' of Vivaldi's favourite work by Max Richter (2/13). The new album includes one



François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles have recorded Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé, a 'terrific debut on the Harmonia Mundi label' – see review on page 40

selection from Richter's version, 'Spring 1', as one of 13 seasonal meditations programmed after the Vivaldi score. It also includes artworks in the album booklet and brief descriptions of the inspiration they provide to the soloist.

The Vivaldi readings strike one as perfectly contoured for radio, nothing too theatrical, no vexing or challenging extremes. The pesky insects of the *Adagio* from 'Summer' are more of the kind one finds meticulously painted on a still life than a genuine nuisance, and the violin figuration of the subsequent storm scene so scrupulously rendered that one has no doubt that this is an image of a storm, not a tempest in itself. There's no fault to be found here and some admirable playing, but little that is deeply memorable.

The segue into the conceptual part of the album – short works inspired by each month of the year, with a 'Postscriptum' – is disheartening. Nils Frahm, whose *Ambre* is pegged to January, has contributed a conventionally pretty bit of soundtrack music, the sort of thing used to illustrate misty morning dew on the grass from any of the zillions of period-piece dramas on Public Television. A fast-paced and heavy-handed version of Rameau's 'Danse des sauvages' (from *Les Indes galantes*) accentuates the percussion so strongly that it becomes ungainly and unidiomatic, while a piece called *April 14* by Aphex Twin is standard pop fare. The addition of a harp line to 'Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen' from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* only makes the accompaniment awkward and intrusive, and a reading of 'Amazing Grace' is hyperbolic and clichéd. The weather doesn't improve from there.

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is a great work diminished for modern audiences through repetition. Hope's 'For Seasons' doesn't rediscover or refresh the work but seems designed merely to extend its easy-listening aura for another half hour or so.

Philip Kennicott

'Op 2'

Hartmann Concerto funebre
Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, MWV O 3
Respighi Ancient Airs and Dances – Suite No 3
Schubert Rondo, D438
CHAARTS Chamber Artists / Sebastian Bohren *vn*
RCA Red Seal Ⓕ 88985 39497-2 (77' • DDD)



First to arrive was a CD called 'Equal' (7/16), the focus there being Beethoven's Violin Concerto, and now we have 'Op 2' (not, you'll note, the designated opus number for the pieces programmed), a selection of works that are close to Sebastian Bohren's heart. There's one incontestable masterpiece, the *Concerto funebre* for violin and strings by a German composer who withdrew into internal exile for the duration of the Second World War, beyond which he refashioned a number of his major works. Karl Amadeus Hartmann's wonderful concerto opens by quoting the 'Hussite Song' that Smetana uses in *Má vlast* and Dvořák in the *Hussites* Overture. Allusions to Wagner haunt the second movement, whereas the violent third anticipates the world of Shostakovich's Seventh and Eighth Quartets, and the work concludes with slow chorale. *Concerto funebre* has not been short of fine recordings, André

PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM MURRAY-SUTTON

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RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Scott of the Antarctic: the complete score

It is a revelation to hear every note that Vaughan Williams wrote, late in 1947, for the then unmade film *Scott of the Antarctic*. There have been previous attempts to revisit some of the unused music he sketched for the film, but now conductor Martin Yates, with the support of the composer's estate, has transcribed from the original manuscripts all the music, comprising some 41 beautifully rounded numbers. Vaughan Williams subsequently reworked some of this material in the *Sinfonia Antartica*, but on this recording we are able to hear for the first time his vivid reaction to the story, before the film was even shot. Standing independently beside the *Sinfonia Antartica*, this is a gripping symphonic experience in its own right.

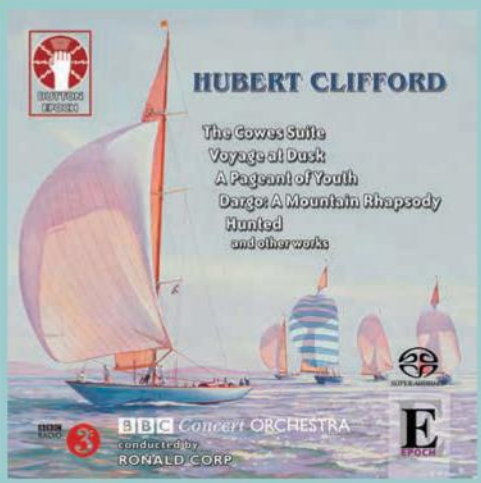


CDLX 7342

ARTHUR BLISS
WILLIAM WALTON (original version)

Concertos for Violin and Orchestra

The Walton and the Bliss Violin Concertos make a compelling programme, given added interest here by the revival of the original version of the Walton Concerto, unheard since the early 1940s. After the earliest performances, Walton rescored it without altering the solo part, and in this superb new recording featuring the eloquent violin of Lorraine McAslan, we can fully appreciate the composer's first thoughts, which perhaps are more a reflection of the pre-Second World War musical world. The Bliss Concerto remains the most impressive British violin concerto not in the day-to-day repertoire, and Lorraine McAslan not only underlines its lyrical qualities but also plays the complete version, reinstating the minor cuts that are sometimes made.



CDLX 7338

HUBERT CLIFFORD

The Cowes Suite and other works

Australian-born Hubert Clifford started his musical career in Melbourne but came to England in 1930 and remained there for the rest of his career. He taught music in a boys' grammar school, moved to the BBC and then became Alexander Korda's music director at London Films, ending as the BBC's Head of Light Music. This exploration of Clifford's music, covering a 30-year span, presents his tuneful early orchestral works written in Melbourne, including *Dargo: A Mountain Rhapsody*, a glorious Moeranesque evocation of his childhood home. Two of his film scores, *Left of the Line* and *Hunted*, and his commission for the BBC's 1958 Light Music Festival, *The Cowes Suite*, which celebrates famous yachtsman Uffa Fox, provide colourful contrast.



CDLX 7339

Cécile Chaminade

Callirhoë: Ballet Symphonique
Concertstück for piano and orchestra

The year 1888 was a remarkable one for French pianist-composer Cécile Chaminade. Her large-scale "ballet symphonique" *Callirhoë* was produced at Marseilles on 16 March, and a few weeks later, on 18 April, there followed the *Concertstück for piano and orchestra*, well received in Antwerp and soon across the world. Here they make a cherishable coupling, and *Callirhoë* is recorded in its complete form for the first time, proving to be a delightful and varied discovery. Chaminade is remembered for her many piano miniatures and *mélodies*, but soloist Victor Sangiorgio's brilliant performance in the *Concertstück for piano and orchestra* reminds us of what a romantic and affecting composer Chaminade could be when given an extended musical canvas.



CDLX 7341

Maximilian Steinberg

Symphony No. 4 *Turksib*
Violin Concerto

Maximilian Steinberg was a pupil – and son-in-law – of Rimsky-Korsakov in pre-Revolutionary Russia, exhibiting all the orchestral and lyrical characteristics one might expect of such a heritage. (Steinberg himself would later be a teacher of Shostakovich.) The *Turksib* Symphony – his fourth – completed in 1933, celebrates the building of the Turkestan-Siberia Railway. Using Kazakh folk melodies and in four richly scored movements, it is an inspiring discovery. Contrastingly, Steinberg's final work, the post-war Violin Concerto, has a valedictory and autumnal feeling, and soloist Sergey Levitin encompasses the virtuosic writing with complete authority while finding the music's passionate and romantic manner.

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Gertler and Thomas Zehetmair having produced two of the best, but Bohren's comprehensive rendition homes in on every varied nuance that Hartmann calls for, from ethereal quiet playing among the instrument's upper reaches to a swingeing attack of the bow elsewhere.

Mendelssohn's teenage D minor Concerto was pioneered in modern times by Yehudi Menuhin, who recorded it memorably, and again Bohren offers a keenly communicative, virtuoso account with seamless passagework, especially in the first movement. If you're expecting premonitions of the great E minor Concerto, be warned, there aren't many, but it's a pleasing and precocious piece, much along the lines of the string symphonies. The other Bohren favourites are Respighi's Third *Ancient Airs and Dances* Suite, a melange of 16th- and 17th-century movements skilfully arranged, and Schubert's A major Rondo, D438, where Bohren affects a winning lilt in the main rondo theme. Phrase shaping is always musical and the playing of the CHAARTS Chamber Artists is highly accomplished throughout. Excellent sound, too.

On a slightly different note, maybe someone could come along with an 'Op 111' CD – opus-led this time, *ie* Beethoven, Reger, Brahms and Dvořák, for starters, all marvellous pieces.

Rob Cowan

'Piano Concertos, Vol 2'

N Boulanger Fantasy
Français Piano Concerto
Ravel Piano Concerto for the Left Hand
Tailleferre Ballade
Florian Uhlig *pf* **Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern / Pablo González**
SWR Music Ⓕ SWR19027CD (72' • DDD)



This discerning programme of French concertos from the first half of the 20th century is the worthy sequel to a 2013 disc (Hänssler, 8/13) by Florian Uhlig, Pablo González and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie that included Debussy's *Fantaisie*, the Concertino of Françaix and the Poulenc and Ravel concertos. The new release warrants an equally warm reception.

Not least remarkable is the fact that two of the four works recorded here are by women. So far as I can tell, the Fantasy by the 25-year-old Nadia Boulanger has been recorded only once before, by David Greilsammer with Steven Sloane conducting the Radio France PO. Uhlig and González make a strong case for a piece that alternates between anguish and tender lyricism, with orchestration that presages Shostakovich. Even more appealing is Germaine Tailleferre's lush Ballade, another seldom-encountered work that argues eloquently for a closer look at this composer's prolific oeuvre.

Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand makes almost as many demands on the orchestra as on the soloist. Happily, González and the German Radio players are full partners in an imaginative reading, facilitated by hand-in-glove ensemble. If it doesn't replace the recording by Claire Chevallier playing a 1905 Érard with Anima Eterna under Jos van Immerseel as my favourite of the piece, it certainly rewards repeated listening.

At a little over 18 minutes, Françaix's 1936 Concerto is the longest work on the disc, as well as the most recent. Of the composers represented here, Françaix was perhaps the most expert pianist. It follows that his use of the instrument is imaginative and resourceful. Uhlig's mercurial emotional range, rhythmic acuity and light touch contribute to an intriguing and witty performance. A slightly flat recorded sound is the only minor deficit of a disc as rich in musical insights as it is enjoyable.

Patrick Rucker

Boulanger – comparative version:
Greilsammer, Rad France PO, Sloane (3/11) (NAIV) V5224
Ravel – selected comparison:
Chevallier, Anima Eterna, Immerseel (10/06) (ZZT) ZZT060901

'Rococo'

'Musique à Sanssouci'
CPE Bach Flute Sonata, Wq124 H551. Trio Sonata, Wq163 H588 **Baron** Concerto in D minor **Finger** A Ground **Graun** Concerto, WV Cv:XIII:96 **Handel** (attrib) Concerto doppio **Janitsch** Quadro in G **Quantz** Fantasien und Preludien, Giedde I.45 - Sarabande; Vivace alla francese **Schultze** Concerto a 5 in B flat
Dorothee Oberlinger *recs* **Ensemble 1700**
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ 88875 13406-2 (79' • DDD)



'Rococo', for which Dorothee Oberlinger directs the brilliant Ensemble 1700, may be themed around Sanssouci but this is no narrow Frederick-the-Great-themed selection of works. Instead it begins in the musical world of his grandparents, the programme seductively flowering into being with a 1704 lute-accompanied ground by the Moravian violist Gottfried Finger, Oberlinger eliciting a softly airy, open sound from her alto recorder in E flat by Meyer (a special size between alto and voiceflute, voiceflute sitting between alto and tenor), with subtle vibrato and ornamentations, lines spun long and wide even as the variations increase in floridity, and the overall legato coloured every so often by rapid individually articulated notes punched out with energetic precision.

Another pre-Frederick pleasure is the 17-year-old Handel's Double Concerto for recorder and bassoon, for which Oberlinger is joined by bassoonist Makiko Kurabayashi. Here, as with the Finger, Oberlinger has chosen her instruments to great affect; a tenor by Francesco Livirghi for the slow movements, whose mellowness she then complements in the fast movements with a forthflute in B flat by Tim Cranmore – forthflutes being a sort of soprano recorder d'amore – from which she draws a gloriously clean, clear and wide tone throughout the high-register writing.

Among the Frederick the Great-shaped pleasures is a courtly Sarabande by Quantz on a Meyer voiceflute, plus a jaunty *Alla francese* whose bundles of dizzying semiquavers Oberlinger renders into birdsong, perky bounce juxtaposed with liquid flow, her tone constantly varying. Her instrument here is another forthflute, this one by di Paolis, but vexingly you won't read this in the booklet-notes because although her array of models are listed they haven't been matched to tracks. So, for your information, in the CPE Bach Sonata you're hearing a bass recorder by Luca di Paolis, and for his solo sonata an Ernst Meyer voiceflute. Baron's D minor Concerto for recorder and lute is on a Ehlert alto. The Graun and Schultze concertos feature two of Meyer's Denner altos, and for the Janitsch quartet a Bressan of his.

The ommission of this information is a minor point, though. Ultimately, what matters is that by the time 'Rococo' ends, Schultze's sparky concerto taking us as close to the Classical era as the recorder can, you truly feel as though you've been taken on a beautiful musical journey.

Charlotte Gardner

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Ravel's Left Hand Piano Concerto

Scottish pianist **Steven Osborne** reveals the immense challenges of the work to Harriet Smith

Steven Osborne clearly remembers the first time he encountered Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. 'I was in my teens and I heard this piece on the radio. I thought it sounded a bit like Ravel and wondered if it was the Left Hand Concerto, but as I listened it became clear it couldn't possibly be because there was no way you could do all that with one hand.' He laughs at the memory.

'Beethoven was the first composer I really fell in love with as a kid; the next composer was Ravel. With Beethoven I mainly listened to just two pieces (the *Pastoral* Symphony and the *Moonlight* Sonata), but with Ravel I actively sought out as much music as I could – except for the Left Hand Concerto, which found me. His music spoke to me – the refinement, the underlying feeling which is so strong yet somehow covered up. It's strange how he could be so cold with people, how he liked to pretend that in his music all you needed was to play the notes.'

What of the notion that Ravel never repeated himself, that he created something new in every piece he wrote? In the Left Hand Concerto I hear the inexorable tread of the recently completed *Boléro* in the way he gradually builds the instrumentation (from fig 27), and hints of the 'Le jardin féerique' from *Ma Mère l'Oye* at the point where the texture becomes utterly crystalline (fig 25). Osborne responds: 'I've never connected this concerto to particular pieces, but modally tinged harmonic language is so characteristic of the work, as you find in the piano's opening chords.'

It's ironic that this concerto, where you're playing with only one hand, uses a bigger orchestra than the G major, adding in contrabassoon and tuba. Yet Ravel has such an extraordinary ear that it never sounds as if the piano has to fight over the top of the texture – is that in fact the case? 'Certainly, it's wonderfully well written in the way the texture thins out when the piano's present. You do feel as if you're fighting occasionally – for instance, at that great *crescendo*, culminating at fig 49, where you're going at full tilt to try to make enough noise. But it's pretty exhilarating. I guess the biggest challenge for me, though, are the big *glissandos* that you do to lead the orchestra in – they have to sound huge and they're really painful to play. They only work if you have a really, really loud instrument; if you don't, in concert you need to make it appear to be a huge gesture.'

Having listened to his new recording, I suggest to Osborne that it seems that he has really absorbed Ravel's markings and tempos and that it sounds very organic as a whole.



'His music spoke to me': Steven Osborne was first drawn to Ravel as a child

'I'm relieved you say that!' he responds. 'Years ago I used to be minutely attentive to all the tiniest details of a score but that began to feel like a bit of a straitjacket and increasingly I've become more relaxed. I try to absorb all the markings from the start, but I don't keep checking back to make sure I'm following every detail. Otherwise it can feel a bit like being a museum curator rather than letting the feel of the music dictate what it wants to do.

'There is one place in the score that I've really puzzled over, though, and haven't solved. It's just before fig 9, where it's marked *Più lento* – to me, that seems in danger of making the music grind to a halt. It's difficult to work out what Ravel wanted – maybe he felt the music becomes more relaxed because there are far fewer notes and miscalculated the tempo marking, or maybe he didn't mean literally the whole passage to be slower than what's before, only that moment. Anyway, I couldn't work out how to incorporate the marking in a way that felt organic, so on the whole I go slightly faster instead.'

I suggest to Osborne that 'organic' is a key word for this piece, every bit as much as it is for a work such as Sibelius's Symphony No 7. Both are huge pieces, exploring a vast range of moods and differing tempos, and yet both are also dispatched in a taut time frame. And both are utterly at the mercy of the conductor.



The historical view

Maurice Ravel

Interview with Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (Daily Telegraph, July 11, 1931)

'It contains a good many jazz effects, and the writing is not so light [as in the G major Concerto]. In a work of this kind it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands.'

Ravel vs Paul Wittgenstein

Ravel, on hearing Wittgenstein's performance in Vienna, 1932, reported in 'At the Piano with Ravel' by Marguerite Long (London, 1973)

MR: 'But it is not that at all!' PW: 'I am an old hand as a pianist and what you wrote does not sound right.' MR: 'I am an old hand at orchestration and it *does* sound right.'

Gramophone review

WRA, on Jacqueline Blancard's recording with the Paris PO under Münch (April 1938)

'I am afraid there is little of the best Ravel in this work. Its opening *Lento* is not reassuring – those deepest-depths blatterings, followed by raucous patternings of factitious working-up: a very cheap start.'

'Yes,' Osborne agrees. 'This isn't a piece you can save from the piano – you need a conductor who is sympathetic to it because you're so dependent on the momentum that's built up from the big orchestral *tuttis*. I was working with Ludovic Morlot and he was rehearsing Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*: he was discussing a tiny gesture in the violins, and the way he described it perfectly captured what Ravel is about for me – I knew he was the person I wanted to record the concertos with.' Much of the resulting recording, which deliciously couples both of Ravel's piano concertos with Falla's *Noches en los jardines de España*, was done in first takes. 'So often they're the best – I used to be really forensic about everything being perfect, but now I'm more concerned about capturing the spontaneity. It's like when you take a photograph of someone when they're spontaneously laughing, it's just so vivid; and then you ask someone to laugh for the camera – they do their best but you can immediately see the difference.'

There's a new edition from Arbie Orenstein of the Left Hand Concerto published by Eulenberg, though Osborne worked mainly from the established Durand one. Was there much difference between the two? 'There are various dubious notes in the original score, and some have been corrected in the new edition. But there's one thing that has always seemed wrong to me. It's at fig 50, where the piano cadenza clearly mirrors the rumbling double-bass figuration we hear at the beginning of the piece. And yet the first two bars are written an octave higher, resulting in a very different texture to the opening. It has always seemed like a misprint.

> *'The impression of difficulty is crucial. But it's true that certain things might sound better with two hands'* – *Steven Osborne*

'So I wrote to the archive where the full orchestral manuscript is kept and asked if they could send me a copy of the fig 50 page. It turns out that the first two bars of the cadenza are in fact written at the same pitch as in the published score; but perhaps Ravel simply forgot to include the *8va basso* sign. Indeed, what follows – a mere sketch of the melody – is an octave higher than published. It's inconceivable musically that this melody is at the right pitch in the orchestral manuscript. So I speculate that the engraver must have turned to a separate manuscript of the cadenza, which was at the right pitch – but only from bar 3. Anyway, this confirmed my hunch that something went wrong in the transfer from manuscript to score. Ravel loved symmetry too much to introduce such a random variation, which is why I play those first two bars of the cadenza an octave lower than published to match the opening.'

Osborne once found himself being asked, post-performance, why he didn't play the concerto using two hands (a notion with which Cortot would have agreed, having made a two-hand version which much irritated Ravel). 'This concertgoer was really insistent and of course the glib answer is that the impression of difficulty is a crucial element of the work itself. But it's true that certain things might sound better with two hands. One of the hardest things is that cadenza, where there's a poignant melody against a tricky accompaniment. It would be so much easier if it were a bad tune, but it's so beautiful that it's really vital to create a subtle intensity of feeling. I really suffered over that!' G

▶ To read the review of Steven Osborne's new Ravel CD, turn to page 40



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Chamber



Liam Cagney listens to the music of Henze-student Detlev Glanert:

'All bobbing ostinatos and shimmering chords, this is an Apollonian rendering of a sun-kissed Italian landscape' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 51



Charlotte Gardner enjoys a disc of Corelli's contemporaries:

'This programme demonstrates that Corelli's was not the only musical style on the menu in early 18th-century Rome' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 55

Bacewicz

Mazovian Dance[a]. Polish Dance[a]. Quartet for Four Cellos[b]. Quartet for Four Violins[c]. Theme & Variations[a]. Trio for Oboe, Harp and Percussion[d]. Trio for Oboe, Violin and Cello[e]. Slavonic Dance[a]

[de]**Jeremy Polmear** *ob* [ace]**David Juritz**, [c]**Victoria Sayles**, [c]**Richard Milone**, [c]**Charlotte Scott** *vns* [b]**Ashok Klouda**, [be]**Rebecca Knight**, [b]**Sarah Suckling**, [b]**Morwenna Del Mar** *vcs* [a]**Diana Ambache** *pf* [d]**Lucy Wakeford** *hp* [d]**Tristan Fry** *perc*

Ambache Ⓕ AMB2607 (66' • DDD)



Time was the only music one encountered on disc by Grażyna Bacewicz was the *Music for Strings, Trumpet and Percussion* and the odd violin solo. Over the past quarter-century her discography has grown (Presto Classical's website lists 52 discs containing at least one work of hers) and in the past five years we have had two cycles of the string quartets, all the extant concertos for violin and cello (and the one for string orchestra) and a good number of other pieces. Full marks to Diana Ambache and company for setting down eight pieces not otherwise available.

The full spread of Bacewicz's career is covered, from two of her earliest works from 1934 – the Trio for oboe, violin and piano and the Theme & Variations – when a student of Boulanger and Flesch, to 1964-65, with the Quartet for four cellos (a dark-hued and exploratory diptych) and marvellous Trio for oboe, harp and percussion, testament to Bacewicz's delight in instrumental nuance and, for this listener, the find of the disc. The more familiar part of her career, ironically the period of Soviet constraint, is covered by the delightful and sprightly Quartet for four violins (written as a teaching aid in 1949) and three brief dances-cum-folk fantasies from 1948 and 1952.

The performances all sound meticulously prepared, and nicely idiomatic too. The recordings – made last July in The Warehouse, Theed Street in London – are beautifully balanced, quite natural and spacious. The copiously illustrated booklet provides a view into the recording process too often veiled from sight. Recommended. **Guy Rickards**

JS Bach

Trio Sonata No 6, BWV530. Viola da gamba Sonata No 3, BWV1029. Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott, BWV721. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639. Keyboard Partita No 5, BWV829 – Passepied. Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter, BWV650. Die Kunst der Fugue, BWV1080 – Contrapunctus XIII. Prelude and Fugue, BWV548. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV645. Das wohltemperirte Clavier: Book 1 – Prelude No 19, BWV864; Book 2 – Fugue No 20, BWV889

Yo-Yo Ma *vc* **Chris Thile** *mandolin* **Edgar Meyer** *db*

Nonesuch Ⓕ 7559 79392-0 (61' • DDD)



Bach arranged for cello, mandolin and double bass must be a first, so hats off to Yo-Yo Ma, Chris Thile and Edgar Meyer for even thinking up this intriguing album. It's also worth saying that these forces don't yield nearly so bass-heavy a sound as you might expect, not least because Ma is frequently to be found in his upper register.

The booklet-notes trumpet the 'unexpected transparency' of these transcriptions and this is certainly true, although in some places it feels as though there is perhaps a little too much air between the textures. Still, it's swings and roundabouts. Take the opening Trio Sonata No 6 in G major, BWV530. Here, the opening *Vivace*'s transparency remains on the interesting side of curious, all three musicians deft and delicate of touch, period-aware without being hair-shirted about it, always bringing a sense of ever-developing musical narrative, and their chamber alchemy a delight to listen in on. The ensuing *Lento*, however, feels slightly too sparse and a little heavy. Likewise, *Wachet auf*, BWV645, gains nothing from these forces, which is interesting given that its original incarnation is hardly a rich, close-textured affair. That said, one of the other chorale arrangements, *Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott*, BWV721, is one of the disc's triumphs with its late-night-jazz-club vibe, and Ma's *pianissimo* singing lines softly clashing with Thile's guitar strumming (a brief switch from the mandolin).

Ultimately I suspect opinion on this album will be so subjective that you need to listen and make up your own mind. What is at least indisputable is that the playing itself is very fine indeed. **Charlotte Gardner**

Beethoven

Trio, Op 87 (arr Newhill). Trio, WoO37[a]. Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano', WoO28 (arr F Stein). Horn Sonata, Op 17[a]. Duo, WoO27 No 3

Les Vents Français with [a]**Éric Le Sage** *pf*

Warner Ⓕ 9029 59195-6 (80' • DDD)



This is rather delicious, and features quite a range of salon music, from the pleasant *galanteries* of the various trios and variations to the one true masterpiece here, the Horn Sonata. Given the starry names that comprise Les Vents Français (Pahud, Leleux et al), warmth and fullness of tone can be taken for granted, and the involvement of regular collaborator Éric Le Sage adds further lustre to the endeavour.

This is all early-period music, dating from before the First Symphony and, in the case of the Trio in G, WoO37, a rare survivor from Beethoven's teenage years in Bonn. Two of the works are arrangements: the Trio in C, Op 87, and the Variations on 'Là ci darem' from *Don Giovanni* were both composed for a pair of oboes with cor anglais but are heard here in skilful later arrangements for oboe, clarinet and bassoon. Perhaps the bare lines of the closing Duo for clarinet and bassoon make for less easy listening but the skill of the composer (who, it has been suggested, may



Renaud and Gautier Capuçon and colleagues bring 'a near-ideal balance of urgency and patience' to their live Brahms string sextets

PHOTOGRAPHY: CAROLINE DOUTRE

not be Beethoven) in filling out harmonies with such straitened means is nonetheless worth hearing.

Radovan Vlatković is the soloist in the Horn Sonata, playing with beautifully even tone across the range. Its original performer, Giovanni Punto (né Jan Václav Stich) was an expert in making the valveless horn chromatic by inserting his hand to various degrees into the instrument's bell. Period performances demonstrate the effect this has on the instrument's tone – the various squawks and squeals it makes when the air column is manhandled in such a way – but, however inauthentic the modern style may be considered, Vlatković makes the best possible case for it. **David Threasher**

Brahms

String Sextets – No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36
Renaud Capuçon, Christoph Koncz *vns*
Gérard Chaussé, Marie Chilemme *vas*
Gautier Capuçon, Clemens Hagen *vcs*
Erato Ⓕ 9029 58883-7 (77' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Conservatoire Darius Milhaud, Aix-en-Provence, March 24, 2016



It's been some years since we've had a disc of Brahms's sextets as thoroughly satisfying as this one, recorded live at the 2016 Aix-en-Provence Easter Festival. The Capuçon brothers and their colleagues may be an ad hoc group but they play with the unanimity and blended tone of a veteran ensemble. Even in the most intricate passages, the six parts dovetail seamlessly, not only in terms of the smoothness of execution but in consistency of phrasing as well. Best of all, the musicians find a near-ideal balance of urgency and patience – the hallmark of a great Brahms interpretation.

The opening movement of the B flat First Sextet is appropriately relaxed yet there is always an underlying sense of propulsion, so that one feels that inexorable and inevitable pull from one phrase to the next. And there's so much character to the playing, too. Listen, for instance, to the development section, beginning around 7'30", and how naturally it evolves from the spontaneously conversational to the passionately argumentative (at 8'20"). The slow movement is purposeful yet intensely expressive within the music's structural and rhythmic constraints that underscore its kinship with a Baroque chaconne. Perhaps the Scherzo could have a little more verve – it's marked *Allegro molto*, after all – but any misgivings are swept away by the joyful and generous lyricism of the finale.

There's just as much to marvel at in the ensemble's performance of the G major Second Sextet, beginning straight away with the first violin's leaping, yearning phrases, shaped so tenderly by Renaud Capuçon. The gleaming melancholy of the Scherzo is mesmerising though ever so slightly overlit, and there's also an edginess to the sound of the strings at the climax of the otherwise sublimely eloquent *Adagio*. These slight sonic imperfections are likely the product of close miking to mitigate any audience noise – though, in fact, the audience is raptly silent except for their applause, included (alas) at the end of each work. Here again, such cavils are easily cast aside. These are interpretations to savour.
Andrew Farach-Colton

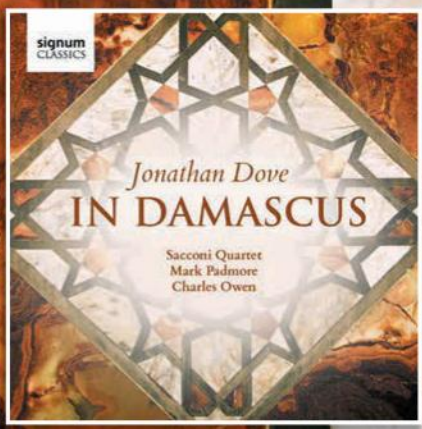
Costanzi · Sollima

'Sinfonie per violoncello'
Costanzi Five Sinfonias for Cello and Basso continuo. Sonata da camera 'ad uso di corni da caccia' **Sollima** The Hunting Sonata
Giovanni Sollima *vc* with **Monika Leskovar** *vc*
Gianluca Ubaldi *timp/tamburello*
Arianna Art Ensemble
Glossa Ⓕ GCD923802 (65' • DDD)

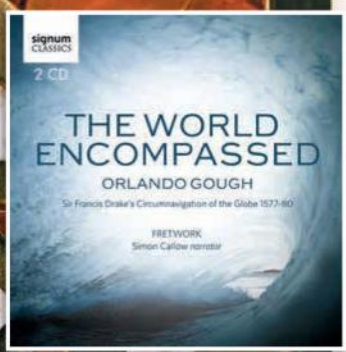


Regular readers of these pages may spot that this is Giovanni Sollima's second

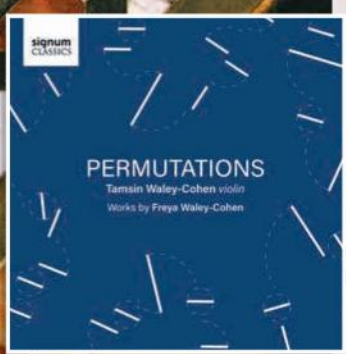
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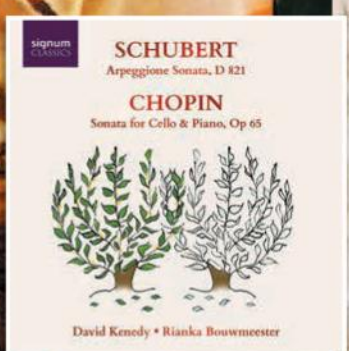
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recording devoted to Giovanni Battista Costanzi, the Rome-based cello virtuoso who served in the household of Vivaldi's famous patron Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni. The first recording (7/16) presented Costanzi's cello sonatas; and while I reviewed that one with enthusiasm, it's just possible that I like this sequel even more.

What's particularly surprising is how different the two discs are, despite the fact that Sollima is again joined by fellow cellist Monika Leskovar and the Arianna Art Ensemble. Because while there's not much between Costanzi's sonatas and sinfonias in terms of form, their stylistic differences are surprisingly profound, the sinfonias having a far more *galant* quality to them, along with a more international, less Corelli-like feel. As a result, while we still get plenty of the muscular panache and slightly rough-edged abandon that Sollima and his 1769 Ruggieri cello brought so enjoyably to the sonatas, we're also treated to an abundance of warmly resonant, strong-toned singing lines, their delectability heightened by the barely-tamed-lion quality Sollima brings to them; listen, for example, to the opening of the D major Sinfonia's *Adagio staccato*.

Additional programming spice comes by way of an entirely different-flavoured *sonata da camera* of Costanzi's for two cellos without basso continuo, in which the two instruments imitate the sounds and melodic gestures of horns. This is much lighter and more intimate than brass imitations might suggest, Sollima and Leskovar playing as one, with some wonderfully atmospheric rumblings from timpanist Gianluca Ubaldi.

Factor in the same recording aesthetic as for the sonatas – immediate while not overbearing – and this is a fantastic and genuinely contrasting successor. **Charlotte Gardner**

Fauré · Saint-Saëns

Fauré Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 109; No 2, Op 117. Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1. Au bord de l'eau, Op 8 No 1. Romance, Op 69 **Saint-Saëns** Cello Sonata No 1, Op 32. Carnaval des animaux – Le cygne. Romance, Op 36

Brian O'Kane *vc* **Michael McHale** *pf*

Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD113 (77' • DDD)



Is it possible to define a distinctively French style of cello-playing? It would probably have something to do with the way the tone is focused: tight, controlled, yet capable of concentrated sweetness and a wonderful flexibility. Whatever it might be, the Irish cellist Brian O'Kane has got the measure of it, and in partnership with Michael McHale the sheer idiomatic elegance of his playing pays rich dividends throughout this handsomely filled disc.

And that's emphatically not damning with faint praise. The idea of pairing Fauré's two cello sonatas with comparable works by his teacher and friend Saint-Saëns is an illuminating one, and both these players have a natural sense for this music's less obvious qualities. They're helped by a recorded balance that places the piano very slightly behind the cello but ensures that both players come through with crystal clarity; a real asset in performances of this freshness and subtlety.

Without ever seeming mannered, the pair find premonitions of Falla and even Stravinsky in Fauré's First Sonata, and capture the restless, sometimes destabilising currents that drive the post-First World War Second Sonata. McHale's contribution is especially rewarding: in the quieter moments of each work (and in Saint-Saëns's Romance, Op 36, in particular) he combines bell-like lucidity with a bright inner glow.

Perhaps O'Kane could have found a slightly richer tone for the really passionate climaxes; but in Saint-Saëns's First Sonata his lower strings thunder with the best of them. Both players find rich contrasts in this impetuous, melodramatic mini-masterpiece. A garland of shorter works surrounds the three sonatas, some more familiar than others – though in these hands, even that old chestnut 'Le cygne' sounds like it's newly blossomed and covered in dew. **Richard Bratby**

Flammer

String Quartets – No 4, 'Voyage éternel de l'oiseau de feu'; No 5, 'Abschiede'

Jade Quartet

Neos Ⓕ NEOS11618 (75' • DDD/DSD)



The Neos label continues to venture where others refuse to (or no longer) tread with its third release devoted to music by Ernst Helmuth Flammer (*b*1949). Active as a conductor, lecturer and organiser (notably in his native Heilbronn), he has built a notable output of works which bear testimony to studies with Klaus Huber and Brian Ferneyhough.

A questing approach to timbre and texture, allied to a complex temporal ground-plan, is evident in the Fourth String Quartet (1997). Its 57 minutes unfold over 18 sections that can be grouped into several larger 'movements', corresponding to an expanded sonata dialectic in terms of its change and return. The varying role of an antagonistic element recalls the quartet-writing of Elliott Carter; and if the Flammer lacks comparable wit or deftness, its seriousness of purpose cannot be gainsaid.

Those coming to his music for the first time should start with the Fifth String Quartet (2002) which, though it may follow a not dissimilar formal trajectory, is considerably shorter, with expressive contrasts easier to assimilate in real-time. The composer's epigraph underlines its starting point in the deaths of friends and associates, but these are not embodied in the actual content, which exhibits increasing animation before returning to its original impassiveness.

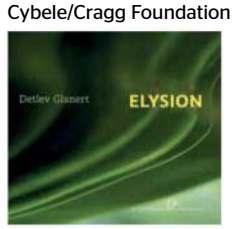
Absorbing music that eschews easy concessions, though the Jade Quartet do all they can to project these works with vigour and insight. The SACD sound is as good as it gets in quartet terms but the composer's own annotations are hardly accommodating to novice listeners. **Richard Whitehouse**

Glanert

Elysion. String Quartet No 2, 'Pas de quatre'. Three Pieces for Clarinet and Piano. Noctambule. Enigmatische Landschaft. Tanzende Landschaft

Gerald Hacke *cl* **Ulriche Nahmmacher, Martin Roth, Liviu Neagu-Gruber, Axel Hess** *vns* **Nora Niggeling, Jens Brockmann** *vas* **Susanne Müller-Hornbach, Michael Hablitzel** *vcs* **Florence Millet, Holger Groschopp, Majella Stockhausen** *pfs*

Cybele/Cragg Foundation Ⓕ CF002 (67' • DDD)



Detlev Glanert matured under the tutelage of Henze, and in three of the six works here he pays homage to his old teacher. In some ways Glanert adopted Henze's career template – he lived in Italy for some years, writes in a Bergian post-tonal style and is Germany's most often performed living opera composer – so the salute is unsurprising. Unfortunately, the results are decidedly lukewarm.

Elysion (2012) is the strongest work here, a three-movement piano quartet composed after Henze's death (the title alludes to the Elysian Fields). Tradition is the watchword, and the discourse abounds in deft counterpoint and tonal inflections; the influence of Glanert's music for solo voice, too, is clear in the lyrical *cantabile*

phrasing on violin. *Pas de quatre* (2005-06), Glanert's Second String Quartet, is based on four musical archetypes that Glanert associates with his mentor (scream, song, dance and escape). Despite a promising start and technically accomplished motivic development, the diverse parts never achieve a greater whole. More successful is the limpid *Enigmatic Landscape* (2001) for two pianos, all bobbing ostinatos and shimmering chords, an Apollonian rendering of the sun-kissed Italian landscape where Henze lived.

The other three works show a similar, unashamedly conservative approach to tradition. *Noctambule* (2008), a sextet for clarinet, piano and string quartet, explores the night and dream subject familiar in Germanic art from Schubert to Sebald. Despite spirited performances and some moments of beauty, its drama is too academic to be compelling. Better are the Three Pieces for clarinet and piano (2003), a quasi-clarinet sonata, and the playful *Dancing Landscape* (2002), which is dedicated to Oliver Knussen and uses a four-note motif mimicking the colloquial version of the Englishman's name.

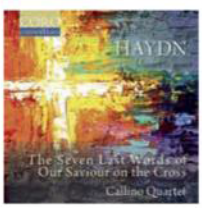
Liam Cagney

Haydn

The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross, HobXX/1*b*

Callino Quartet

Coro Ⓕ COR16152 (67' • DDD)



A grotto draped in black, a single lantern, a bishop prostrate before the altar: Haydn himself described the circumstances of the first performance of his *Seven Last Words*, and they're a useful prop for any Haydn lover who can't quite reconcile the gap between Haydn's utilitarian string quartet arrangement of the piece and his usual mastery of the quartet medium. They're a reminder that the *Seven Last Words*, in whatever form they're performed, are nothing if not a piece of sacred theatre.

The Callino Quartet seem to get that, at least some of the time – and those moments are the most satisfying of this generally sensitive and thoughtful performance on The Sixteen's Coro label (the quartet's violinist Sarah Sexton is leader of The Sixteen's orchestra). They play on modern instruments with what they describe as a historically informed approach; very sparing with vibrato. And they've chosen, by and large, not to emulate orchestral or choral sonorities. The impression one takes away is of a rather chaste performance which from time to time breaks into something more passionate, more involving – and more dramatic.

But those breakthroughs are worth waiting for: the sepulchral opening phrases of 'Consummatum est', the harsh, piercing violin sonorities after the anything-but-parched pizzicato opening of 'Sitio'; the way they raise the tempo and the temperature from 4'40" onwards in 'Pater, dimitte illis' and – above all – their beautifully gauged silences throughout the cycle. The Callinos have an eloquent way of ending phrases too: listen to the way the final bars of 'Deus meus' fall haltingly into place. Insights like these are persuasive; and, if the quartet version of the *Seven Last Words* convinces you, this recording certainly offers a perspective worth hearing. **Richard Bratby**

Mahler · J Strauss II

Mahler Symphony No 4 (arr Stein)[a] **J Strauss II** Kaiser-Walzer, Op 437 (arr Schoenberg). Schatz-Walzer, Op 418 (arr Webern)

[a]**Christiane Karg** *sop* **Renaud Capuçon, Katja Lammermann** *vns* **Antoine Tamestit** *va* **Clemens Hagen** *vc* **Alois Posch** *db* **Magali Mosnier** *fl* **Sebastian Manz** *cl* **Albrecht Mayer** *ob* **Herbert Schuch** *pf* **Gereon Kleiner** *harmonium* **Leonhard Schmidinger, Martin Grubinger** *perc*

Orfeo Ⓕ C925 161B (77' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Mozarteum, Salzburg, July 27, 2011



What is the point of arranging music? To bring a work to a wider audience (when Beethoven and Brahms domesticated their symphonies); to tailor it to the gifts of a performer, often the arranger themselves, such as Kreisler or Rachmaninov; to simplify or analyse the original for private purposes. Yet the aims of Schoenberg in founding the Society for Private Musical Performance in 1919 ran counter to all these principles. In fact the *Schatz-Walzer* performed here was worked up by Webern to raise funds through a benefit concert in May 1921. All in vain; the Society closed within six months.

Nonetheless, the arrangement is consciously restrained, abjuring both the solo woodwinds available for the occasion and the contented breadth of the original with its march-band percussion. Schoenberg arranged the *Emperor Waltz* four years later for a *Pierrot lunaire* ensemble and in so doing soured some of its creamy harmonies with that work's edgy, hysterical nature. And when Erwin Stein worked on Mahler's Fourth at Schoenberg's behest, he knew that there was no need to clarify textures in a symphony where every instrumental colour is already 'a means of characterisation rather than sonority'. What had first enthralled him as a teenager, as Mahler's music did so many of us, was its 'total lack of academicism…so novelistic, adventurous and thrilling'.

Sensitivity to these contexts is a distinguishing mark of all three performances. The festival atmosphere heightens contrasts even if the Austrian radio recording picks up more bass and piano than the much-maligned harmonium which would otherwise lend sweetness to thinned-out, deracinated textures. Too many other recordings of Stein's version succeed only in sounding like mini-Mahler. This dares to go further, to narrow the gap between the original and Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony.

The only one to touch it is a recent recording from the Spannungen festival, given by a similarly 'all-star' ensemble: the parody even more raw and fierce in the Scherzo, the *Poco adagio* slightly frenetic, even stressful, and Christiane Oelze a pale Pierrot in the finale. I prefer the more properly Viennese nature of the Salzburg performance, which is as immaculately polished as it is sly and affectionate by turns. The second-movement waltz makes no less a phantasmagoric caricature of its genre than Ravel's two-faced tribute. Christiane Karg's soprano falls more gratefully on the ear than Oelze's calculated pitch-bending; as a vivid and touching storyteller, she (perhaps wisely) leaves most of the setting's subversive nudges and winks to her instrumental colleagues, who play as if on the edge on their seats. Applause is deservedly retained.

Peter Quantrill

Mahler – selected comparison:

Oelze, Fest Ens Spannungen (AVI) AVI8553334

Ornstein

Violin Sonatas[a] – No 1, Op 26; No 2, Op 31; [No 3], Op *posth* – Andante. Hebraic Fantasy[a]. Intermezzo[b]. A Poem[b]. Prelude[b]

[a]**Francesco Parrino** *vn* [b]**Stefano Parrino** *fl* **Maud Renier** *pf*

Brilliant Ⓑ 95079 (72' • DDD)



The life of Leo Ornstein (1893-2002) is of a fascination such that his music often

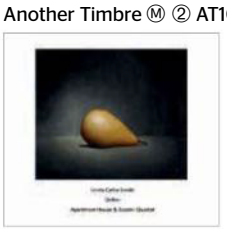
tends to be overlooked. The output for violin and piano gives a fair account of its strengths and failings; not least the two numbered sonatas – the earlier (1915) as poised expressively as its successor (1916) is emotionally unstable. Lacking in both is any real certainty of purpose, as Ornstein juxtaposes often striking ideas without an underlying continuity emerging. No such failings affect the *Hebraic Fantasy* (1929), whose long-breathed eloquence is shared by the undated Third Sonata, which extends this to form a 12-minute movement of convincing thematic evolution and formal unity.

Uneven music this may be, but Francesco Parrino and Maud Renier render it with undeniable technical finesse and emotional commitment. At just under an hour this would have made for relatively short measure on disc (though a Waltz is also listed on the composer's dedicated website at **poonhill.com** – is this extant?), so Ornstein's three pieces for flute and piano have been included. The *Prelude* (*c*1950) enlivens its pensiveness with Eastern melodic overtones, while the *Intermezzo* (1959) exudes a more capricious yet still understated manner. *A Poem* (1979) is a brief and appealingly winsome miniature from this composer's productive old age.

Stefano Parrino is well suited to these pieces, with the whole recital given sound of warmth and clarity. Booklet-notes are informative if not uncritical, and this disc is worth investigation by those drawn to Delius and Cyril Scott, or the more conservative works of Ives and Cowell. **Richard Whitehouse**

LC Smith

Cantilena[a]. Drifter[b]. Far From Shore[c]. Folkestone[d]. Galanthus[e]. Gondola[d]. Moi qui tremblais[f]. Piano Quintet[g]. Poire[h]. Ricercar[i]
[cef]**Mira Benjamin** *vn* [a]**Emma Richards** *va* [ci]**Anton Lukoszevieze** *vc* [bcfgh]**Philip Thomas** *pf* [b]**Diego Castro Magas** *gtr* **Simon Limbrick** [a]*vibraphone*/[f]*perc* [dg]**Bozzini Quartet**
Another Timbre Ⓜ ② AT105x2 (144' • DDD)



Linda Catlin Smith (*b*1957) operates out of bustling urban Toronto, although her work puts you in mind of remote no-man's-lands, places where music would normally fear to tread. This two-CD album of selected chamber and instrumental compositions opens with *Cantilena*, a 2013 duo for viola (Emma Richards) and vibraphone (Simon Limbrick) that acts as a telling entry point into Smith's instantly alluring although cryptic sound world. Personally, the plugged-in, motorised whir of the vibraphone feels instinctively urban; I'm hearing Steve Reich and the Modern Jazz Quartet's Milt Jackson. But Smith lets gut(sy) strings and metal bars that clink like ice in a fizzy drink coexist in a magical way, the poker-faced vibraphone tiptoeing around the viola's guttural double-stopped intervals – she notes that the range of both instruments is almost identical.

Structurally, echoes of a verse-and-chorus form emerge, although points of demarcation feel endlessly flexible – qualities shared by her 2014 Piano Quintet and the conspicuously bold *Drifter* for piano (Philip Thomas) and guitar (Diego Castro Magas) from 2009. A paradox grows curiouser and curiouser in the Quintet, with melodic fragments becoming increasingly tangled as the underlying harmony remains unflappably translucent; a comparable process in *Drifter* ends up with the guitarist moving from definitive pitch towards percussive slides and knocks. Anton Lukoszevieze and Mira Benjamin play unaccompanied string pieces while the Montreal-based Bozzini Quartet offer two string quartets – including the JMW Turner-inspired *Folkestone* (1999) which, referencing the master's sketchbooks, offers 24 subtlety shaded, then re-shaded and re-reshaded, perspectives on the same pool of material. **Philip Clark**

Szymanowski

Violin Sonata, Op 9. Mythes, Op 30. Harnasie, Op 55 – Danse paysanne. La berceuse d'Aïtacho Enia, Op 52. King Roger – Chant de Roxane. Nocturne and Tarantella, Op 28
Marie Radauer-Plank *vn* **Henrike Brüggen** *pf*
Genuin Ⓕ GEN17459 (68' • DDD)



The litmus test here is the start of 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse', the most famous of the three *Mythes*, where, compared with Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien (Hyperion), Marie Radauer-Plank and Henrike Brüggen fall short of realising the music's full sense of rapture and unfathomable mystery, Ibragimova entering on the softest *pianissimo*, Tiberghien investing the piano part with a wealth of tone poetry. In the third Myth, 'Dryads and Pan' – which suggests 'a murmuring forest on a hot summer night, [with] thousands of mysterious voices' – again Ibragimova and Tiberghien score highest for fine-spun textures suggestive of moonlit spiders' webs dripping with dew, so delicate, even tactile. Radauer-Plank and Brüggen are also excellent, more like Baiba and Lauma Skride (Orfeo) perhaps, and while not quite on Ibragimova's level for sweetness and imagination, their relative restraint pays dividends in music that harbours limitless potential for subtle shading. In a sense 'playing straight' works just as well.

Maybe the most successful performance on the current disc is the D minor Sonata of 1904, where even within the first minute there are vivid premonitions of those later Dryads. But the sonata's language is for the most part redolent of the great German Romantics, especially of Brahms and Schumann, and Radauer-Plank's playing – a combination of tonal chasteness and Romantic ardour, with an expressive though never overbearing use of vibrato – suits the piece to perfection. The much later *La berceuse d'Aïtacho Enia* is sustained at a broader tempo than on Ibragimova's recording. Both versions work well, and much the same can be said of the more familiar, and equally bewitching, *Nocturne and Tarantella*.

The Hyperion collection of the 'complete music for violin and piano' also includes *Three Paganini Caprices*, Op 40, and the Romance in D, Op 23, but not Roxana's Song from the opera *King Roger* or the Peasant Dance from the ballet *Harnasie*, both of them arrangements by the noted violinist Paul Kochanski which are warmly performed in the context of the present programme. In summing up I'd say that Radauer-Plank and Brüggen play beautifully if without those special reserves of magic that distinguish Ibragimova and Tiberghien while, regarding the *Mythes*, Krystian Zimerman and Kaja Danczowska (DG) are also well worth revisiting. They too enter Szymanowski's mystical world with ease and a sense of wonder. **Rob Cowan**

Mythes, Nocturne & Tarantella, Violin Sonata, Berceuse – selected comparison:
Ibragimova, Tiberghien (7/09) (HYPE) CDA67703
Mythes – selected comparisons:
Danczowska, Zimerman (6/81[R]) (DG) 477 5903GOR
B & L Skride (11/15) (ORFE) C873 141A

Vieuxtemps

Viola Sonatas – Op 36; Op 60. Capriccio, Op *posth*. Élégie, Op 30. Étude. La nuit. Souvenir d'Amériques: Variations burlesques (Yankee Doodle Variations)
Timothy Ridout *va* **Ke Ma** *pf*
Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD130 (72' • DDD)

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

BOLD AS BRASS

Christian Hoskins takes stock of a varied range of brass discs, from Baroque to contemporary, via jazz and African American spirituals



Brass United play a mixture of arrangements on their album Pitch Black

It would be difficult to imagine a more varied group of recordings than this quartet of releases of music for brass. **Pitch Black** by Brass United, an ensemble comprising five current and former players from a number of leading European orchestras, features music composed between the 18th and 21st centuries. The first 10 arrangements on the album, grouped under the heading 'Pulcinella Suite 2.0', are derived from the same musical sources as Stravinsky's ballet. In this case, however, the works of Pergolesi, Monza, Gallo, Wassenaer and Parisotti feature in arrangements for brass quintet and harpsichord by the Belgian trombonist and composer Steven Verhelst. For all the skill of the playing, I found the results somewhat uninvolving, especially when compared with Stravinsky's original version for chamber orchestra. The musicians are on surer ground with Berio's *Call*, scored for brass quintet, as well as MacMillan's *A New Song* for four-part choir and organ, the latter instrument retained in the new arrangement. In the case of Jacob TV's *Pitch Black*, a piece that features a pre-recorded and manipulated voice track, the result arguably sounds more effective with Verhelst's scoring than the original version for four saxophones. The selection also includes three pieces from Albéniz's *Suite española* and Bartók's complete *Romanian Dances* arranged by the group's tuba player, Stéphane Labeyrie.

sevenfive brings a contemporary programme of music centred on the American composer John Corigliano and five of his former pupils, who composed a number of pieces for their teacher's 75th birthday in 2013. Other than Corigliano's *Gazebo Dances Overture*, which was originally composed for piano four hands, all the pieces were specifically scored for brass ensemble, and all but one, David Sampson's *Entrance*, receive their first recordings. Gaudete Brass's core quintet is supplemented by additional forces for Corigliano's noble *Antiphon* and searching *Fanfares to Music*, perhaps the most immediately appealing pieces on the disc. Jeremy Howard Beck's *ROAR* makes use of mutes and flutter-tonguing and builds to a visceral climax, while Corigliano's 75th birthday is reflected not only in the title of Steven Bryant's *sevenfive* but also by the use of intervals of sevenths and fifths and rhythmic groupings of seven and five. The four movements of Jonathan Newman's *Prayers of Steel* evoke the rural and urban landscapes of the Midwest, while David Sampson's slowly unfolding *Still* brings echoes of Copland. Conrad Winslow's tripartite *The Record of a Lost Tribe*, depicting an imaginary bygone civilisation, is perhaps the most challenging music on the disc but also the piece I suspect will most justify repeated listening. All the pieces receive committed performances from Gaudete Brass and are superbly recorded.

Signals from Heaven brings a striking mix of 17th-century Baroque, African American spirituals and works by Tōru Takemitsu and Duke Ellington. The Baroque pieces make a considerably stronger impression here than they do on the Brass United disc, partly a result of the larger forces used (a dozen players including a percussionist) but also because of the vitality of the performances. The Toccata from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (a piece which also opens the *Vespers*) has tremendous panache and the five sonatas and canzonas by Giovanni Gabrieli are wonderfully expressive and sonorous, the polychoral writing heard to splendid effect in the spacious acoustic of the Lukaskirche Dresden. Ellington is represented by an instrumental arrangement by the jazz musician Boris Netsvetaev of 'Come Sunday' from the Sacred Concerto No 1. The four spirituals on the disc include the traditional 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child' as well as Gershwin's 'Summertime'. All are sung by Berwaerts, who reveals a silken vocal technique in addition to his skills on the trumpet. The highlight of disc is the performance of Takemitsu's *Signals from Heaven*, which marries of beauty of sound with spiritual fervour. This is altogether a very impressive release.

Fantasy showcases the talent of Philip Cobb, principal trumpet of the London Symphony Orchestra since 2009. The majority of tracks on the album, Cobb's third, feature the cornet and involve arrangements from the popular and jazz repertoire, the principle exception being an appearance of Dvořák's Song to the Moon. Highlights include a bravura rendition of Bellstedt's *Napoli* and a sublime performance of Landesman and Wolf's 'Springtime can really hang you up the most' in an arrangement for flugelhorn and vibraphone. The Central Band of the Royal Air Force provide a spirited backing, although sound rather distantly recorded in comparison to Cobb. However, the solo playing is what's important here and no one is likely to be disappointed at the quality of musicianship on offer. G

THE RECORDINGS



Pitch Black
Brass United
Channel Classics Ⓕ CCS38717



sevenfive
Gaudete Brass
Cedille Ⓕ CDR90000 169



Signals from Heaven
Jeroen Berwaerts; Salaputia Brass
Audite Ⓕ AUDITE97 725



Fantasy
Philip Cobb; Central Band of the RAF
Doyen Ⓕ DOYCD366



He built his reputation on the violin: writing for it, playing it to a level that invited comparisons with Paganini. But the 19th-century Belgian musician Henri Vieuxtemps also composed several works for the viola. And, while you'd struggle to find any transcendent masterpieces among them, their obscurity appeals to ambitious players hoping to make a dent in the viola repertory.

Such as Timothy Ridout, winner of last year's Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition. At only 21 years old, this British player understandably has a way to go in terms of refining his palette. What he does offer is a gorgeous tone, a thoughtful approach to phrasing and an infectious sense of impetuosity, which puts him in a good position to tackle the centrepiece on this programme, the Sonata in B flat, Op 36. Here is music that, in its brand of lyricism and understated ingenuity, ploughs a similar furrow to Mendelssohn. It needs a serenely introspective performance, and gets one. Ridout makes the most of the viola's cellistic timbre in the first movement and the operatic sway of the second movement barcarolle. For all that his reading can't match the subtlety of some competitors', most notably Tabea Zimmermann's, there is plenty to enjoy here in terms of poetic flow.

But that can only go so far in the unfinished Sonata in B flat, Op 60, a work that needs a lot of extra help. Even Ridout's sense of propulsion can't sustain us through a scale-filled second movement that, without more meticulous contouring, starts to sound like a viola study. Where he and his sensitive pianist Ke Ma are at their most convincing is in the short character works: the soulful *cantabile* lines of the *Élégie*, Op 30, and the exotically perfumed *La nuit*, Vieuxtemps's transcription of Félicien David's *Le désert*. He relishes the technical showmanship of the Capriccio in C minor and the exuberance of the neo-baroque *Étude*. Evidently this viola player is capable of generating strong colours. With time, he will hopefully explore more of the gradations between them. **Hannah Nepil**

Sonata, Op 36 – selected comparison:
T Zimmermann, Gerstein (11/10) (MYRI) MYR004

'Czech Viola Sonatas'

Feld Viola Sonata **Husa** Suite, Op 5 **Kalabis** Viola Sonata, Op 84 **Martinů** Viola Sonata, H355
Kristina Fialová *va* **Igor Ardašev** *pf*
Supraphon Ⓕ SU4211-2 (61' • DDD)



Here's a bold experiment: a survey of viola music by Czech composers, mostly born in the 1920s, whose names many of us won't recognise. Viola player Kristina Fialová and pianist Igor Ardašev have done well to remind us that good music in this corner of the globe didn't die with Martinů.

That said, the Suite for viola and piano, Op 5, is not the most flattering representation of Karel Husa. The composer, who died only last December, wrote it as a student at the Prague Conservatory in 1945, shortly before leaving for Paris, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger and Arthur Honegger. As such it displays little of the artistic curiosity – his forays into microtonality and serialism – that distinguished his later career. But what it does, it does relatively well, namely to espouse neoclassicism, while acknowledging Husa's debt to his Czech forefathers' lyricism.

Two premiere recordings make a more lasting impression. Viktor Kalabis's 1997 Viola Sonata, Op 84, is a knotty, uncompromising piece as much informed by Impressionistic harmony as it is by Bartók's muscular rhythms. Meanwhile, Jindřich Feld's Viola Sonata, written in 1955, combines a neo-romantic tonal language with a Stravinskian rhythmic ingenuity. Both are emotionally unbuttoned, compelling works, raising the question as to why neither Feld nor Kalabis ever made more of a splash on the international scene.

On the whole, Fialová and Ardašev do their countrymen a good turn, enjoying every opportunity for high drama. Fialová has a velvety tone, perfect for the works' lyricism. But there is one thing lacking: variety. As a result, the wild dynamic contrasts of the Kalabis fail to make their mark, as do those more ethereal passages in the Feld. And in the remaining offering, Martinů's Viola Sonata, you can't help thinking longingly of Maxim Rysanov, whose 2015 recording revealed a much greater grasp of the work's capriciousness. Not a standout release, then, but intriguing nevertheless. **Hannah Nepil**

Martinů – selected comparison:
Rysanov, Apekisheva (6/15) (BIS) BIS2030

'Maestro Corelli's Violins'

Montanari Concertos, Op 1 – No 2; No 6; No 7
Mossi Concertos, Op 4 – No 11; No 12
Valentini Concerto, Op 7 No 11
Collegium Musicum 90 / Simon Standage *vn*
Chandos Chaconne Ⓕ CHAN0818 (69' • DDD)



'Maestro Corelli's Violins' is an intriguing title for a recording featuring no works by Corelli, but it refers to the fact that when he conducted the Rome premiere of Handel's *La Resurrezione di nostro Signor Gesù Cristo* on Easter Day in 1708, among the extra violinists he drafted in for the occasion were the three featured here. Giuseppe Valentini, Antonio Montanari and Giovanni Mossi are lesser-known names today but back then were prominent violinist-composers whose services Corelli would have been pleased to secure. Furthermore, all three wrote very differently to Corelli, so besides this programme offering under-heard repertoire under an imagination-sparking title, it also demonstrates that Corelli's was not the only musical style on on the menu in early 18th-century Rome.

The Valentini concerto grosso is a case in point; one of his 12 Op 7 Concerti grossi of 1710, it frequently looks beyond the harmonic and textural concerto norms of the time. Then the two concertos from Mossi are different again, their own joys including the unusual sonority of Op 4 No 12 with its viola-less ripieno section. Finally we have the sixth and seventh concertos from Montanari's Op 1, notable for already getting a second whirl in the recording studio after Ensemble Diderot and Johannes Pramsohler's premiere recording of them last year. In fact it'll be interesting to see just how much Montanari is floating around the recording catalogue in a decade's time, given the degree of enthusiasm with his music is now being rediscovered.

What Collegium Musicum 90 then bring to these works is ensemble-playing to relish: crisp, lucid textures, a feeling of absolute togetherness of thought and action, and a lovely combination of excitement and respect for the music. Simon Standage himself is equally on form, bringing a wonderfully clean, wiry sweetness to the solo violin lines. So a great offering, and regarding the Montanari a different and thoroughly worthwhile alternative to Ensemble Diderot's own Montanari disc. **Charlotte Gardner**

Montanari – comparative version:
Pramsohler, Ens Diderot (2/16) (AUDA) ADX13704

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHANNEL CLASSICS

Jack Brymer

Mark Pullinger surveys the solo and orchestral career of this self-taught British clarinettist, whose recording of the Mozart Concerto was used to evocative effect in the film Out of Africa

Even if you're too young to have seen Jack Brymer (1915-2003) perform in concert, the chances are you've heard him play without even knowing it. Not only was he principal clarinet in three London orchestras, taking part in numerous recordings, but also it was his third recording of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto that was used so evocatively in the 1985 film *Out of Africa* (with Meryl Streep), which introduced the work to a far wider public.

I only saw Brymer once, playing in a post-retirement gig with the Mozart Festival Orchestra in which he was fully costumed in period attire. I suspect that's about the only concession to 'period' that Brymer ever made. Listening to his playing now, in the light of the period-instrument revolution, is to wander back to another sound world. Brymer was largely self-taught, and his generous use of vibrato was inspired by the playing of the oboist Leon Goossens. His tone was warm and flexible, possessing a distinctive velvety texture.

Listening to his playing now is to wander back to another sound world

His big break came in 1947, when Sir Thomas Beecham appointed him principal clarinet of his Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; he was direct successor to Reginald Kell, who became principal when the orchestra was founded a year earlier. Brymer received the telephone call out of the blue, and assumed it was one of his pals playing a prank. The likelihood is that Brymer was recommended to Beecham by horn player Dennis Brain, who had admired his playing when they served in the RAF together during the Second World War. Brymer became a member of the 'Royal Family' – as the RPO woodwind principals were collectively known at that time.

After Beecham's death, Brymer moved to the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1963, staying until 1971 when Pierre Boulez arrived wanting a more 'avant-garde, harsher, more cutting' sound, according to Brymer. He then served in the London Symphony Orchestra under such principal conductors as André Previn and Claudio Abbado.

It was fitting that Brymer shared a birthday with Mozart, for he recorded all of his music for clarinet. Any Icons survey must focus on his three recordings of the concerto. The first, with Beecham, strikes me as the least ideal. Beecham draws ravishing playing from the RPO, but the performance revels in a dreamy idyll. Far finer are his second recording, with Sir Colin Davis, and his third, with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. John Warrack, reviewing the latter for *Gramophone* in 1973, remarked, 'There is all the old grace; but to it is now added a note of more wistful affections and a sense of the shadow that falls not only across the ravishing slow movement but even across the gaiety of the finale.'

Brymer treats the clarinet's lowest register – its chalumeau – with broad tone, tightened to a thinner sound in alt. In each of his recordings, Brymer plays his own simple cadenza in the *Adagio*, eschewing the usual one which references the slow movement from the Clarinet Quintet. One oddity of the Marriner version is Brymer's decision to cut bar 333 from the first movement because it repeats the previous bar. When played on the basset clarinet – as the concerto invariably is these days – this bar is played down an octave (which is not possible on the standard clarinet).

As director of the London Wind Soloists, Brymer recorded all the wind serenades, which are still cherished, especially the chortling finale to the *Gran Partita*, K361. Very little of Brymer's other solo work is currently available on disc, although the *Adagio* from Heinrich Baermann's Clarinet Quintet No 3 – long misattributed to Wagner! – is on a terrific ASMF disc that includes Strauss's *Metamorphosen* and Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*.

Brymer's career as a principal clarinettist is well documented on disc, particularly his Beecham period. One of the outstanding recordings with Beecham is Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade* – evidence, say the

DEFINING MOMENTS

- **1947 – *A royal appointment***
Appointed by Sir Thomas Beecham as principal clarinet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
- **1960 – *Mozart concerto debut***
First recording of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, with the RPO under Beecham
- **1963 – *Pastures new***
Moves to the BBC Symphony Orchestra
- **1971 – *London colleagues***
Takes up post at the London Symphony Orchestra, sharing principal duties with Gervase de Peyer
- **1985/1990 – *Celebrated artist***
The LSO accords him the rare tribute of both 70th- and 75th-birthday concerts

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Mozart Clarinet Concerto
LSO / Colin Davis
Philips
The concerto sits alongside Brymer's honeyed recording of the Clarinet Quintet with the Allegri Quartet.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID SINCLAIR

critics, of the exemplary freedom Beecham gave his wind players. However, Brymer explained that this was not the case: 'This stands out in my memory as one of the really serious series of sessions with Beecham, and one in which he for once dictated all points of phrasing and style, rather than employing his usual method of inspiring his players to feel the music in his way.'

The standout recording from his LSO years is Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2 under Previn, especially his melting solo in the *Adagio*. In a very different mood, he supplied the sassy solo that opens Previn's recording of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* – he enjoyed playing jazz and also played the saxophone, as heard in 'The Old Castle' in Abbado's LSO recording of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Instrumental



Richard Bratby is impressed by Rachel Barton Pine's Paganini:

'The dramatic timing, the burnished middle register, the liquid evanescence of Paganini's stratospheric flights: it's all there' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 62



Patrick Rucker on Jean-Philippe Collard's Schumann:

'The contrary leaps seem more an overflowing of joy than an explosion of pianistic athleticism' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 65

Beethoven

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 6'
Piano Sonatas – No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 13, 'Quasi una fantasia', Op 27 No 1; No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106
Jonathan Biss *pf*
Meyer Media Ⓕ MM17034 (69' • DDD)



Jonathan Biss's slowly evolving Beethoven sonata cycle has now reached Vol 6. And the main offering here is the greatest challenge of all Beethoven sonatas – possibly all sonatas – the *Hammerklavier*, on which Biss writes a typically thoughtful booklet-note. More of that in a moment.

We begin in buoyant mood with Op 14 No 1, its opening movement dispatched with aplomb; Biss's second movement is taken at a true *Allegretto*, though Goode, a touch slower, reveals more anguish. The finale combines buoyancy with just a touch of grit, the semiquaver running scales immaculately managed. There's a lot to admire in Op 27 No 1 as well, not least Biss's overall pacing, though Goode and Bavouzet have more fun in the closing *Allegro vivace*.

That Biss has thought long and hard about Op 106 is abundantly clear, as he writes: 'Trying to describe the terrible power of this music is an exercise in frustration.' But there's no sense of frustration as he launches powerfully into the *fortissimo* opening phrases. Time and again in this performance we're reminded of the many quieter dynamics within the sonata's span. There are as many ways of reading this piece as there are pianists – Levit sets off at an almost suicidally fast pace; Gilels, spacious by comparison, explores the extremes of what is musically possible; while Osborne really rips into the opening with a devil-may-care aplomb. Common to all three is a sense of being right at the edge of what is possible, compared to which Biss sounds a little too controlled. In the finest performances even its quietest moments have a drive, whereas in this new recording the tension can sag a little (sample from 8'17" in the first movement, where the delicate detail is beautifully observed but it sits back too much, the subsequent build-up not quite convincing). The close of the movement is, in Osborne's hands, ear-bendingly powerful, compared to which Biss sounds a touch contained. The minuscule Scherzo needs a greater rawness, to my mind, such as that conveyed by Guy in his second recording (2006). Biss soothes the Scherzo's angst with a wonderfully rhetorical slow movement, making you abundantly aware of its ebb and flow. Yet Levit (like Biss relatively fast) imbues the music with even more inevitability, while Gilels, hugely spacious, uncovers its profundity as few others can. But perhaps my biggest quibble is with the finale itself, Biss's fugue favouring clarity over power and ending up sounding relatively lightweight. This may be to your taste but I missed the sheer strength of will evident in the hair-raising accounts by Levit and Osborne.

Harriet Smith

Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:
Goode (3/94) (NONE) 7559 79328-2
Sonata No 13 – selected comparison:
Bavouzet (3/14) (CHAN) CHAN10798
Hammerklavier – selected comparison:
Gilels (12/83R) (DG) 463 639-2GOR or 453 221-2GX9
Guy (11/06) (NAIV) V5023
Levit (11/13) (SONY) 88883 70387-2
Osborne (10/16) (HYPE) CDA68073

Chopin

Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57. Preludes, Op 28
Emmanuel Despax *pf*
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD482 (55' • DDD)



Emmanuel Despax prefaces his recording of Chopin's Preludes with a booklet-note that explains his concern for textual accuracy and avoidance of 'unauthorised' markings in regard to dynamics, pedalling and phrasing. Fair enough, yet his quest for intimacy and authenticity largely yields reticent, overly careful results. Despax's sedate left-hand runs in the G major (No 3) have nothing on Argerich, Pollini, Ashkenazy & co, while little hesitancies and ritards at the tops of phrases in Nos 8, 10, 12 and 19 impede the music's momentum. No 16 is held back, rhythmically loose and hardly *con fuoco*, and No 24's rising scales lack thrust. In this context Nos 14 and 22 are surprisingly assertive and angular, but that's 82 riveting seconds out of 41 largely uneventful minutes.

While Despax's sensitivity is never in doubt, the Berceuse grows more flaccid and shapeless as it progresses. However, the Barcarolle has real backbone and dynamism, capped by a coda where the well-contoured polyphony truly sings out. Too bad the Preludes lack comparable projection and profile. If you like your Chopin Preludes designed to drawing-room specifications, Ivan Moravec's more nuanced and imaginative conceptions beat Despax at his own game. **Jed Distler**

Preludes – selected comparison:
Moravec (2/98) (SUPR) SU3165-2

Chopin

Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35. Three Mazurkas, Op 50. Etudes: Op 10 – No 5; No 7; Op 25 No 4. Fantaisie, Op 49. Preludes, Op 28 – No 9; No 10; No 11. Nocturne No 5, Op 15 No 2. Polonaise No 5, Op 44
Angela Hewitt *pf*
Fryderyk Chopin Institute Ⓕ NIFCCD631
(73' • DDD)
Recorded live during the 10th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition, Philharmonic Concert Hall, Warsaw, October 5-15, 1980



As the booklet-notes point out, the big news emerging from the 1980 Chopin Competition was the jury's decision not to name Ivo Pogorelich among the finalists,

and Martha Argerich's sensational withdrawal from the jury in dissent. If the publicity essentially launched Pogorelich's career, the same cannot be said of another contestant who did not progress to the finals, Angela Hewitt. Could it be in a spirit of contrite restitution that the National Chopin Institute has released a sampling of Hewitt's live performances during the first, second and third stages of the competition that October in Warsaw?

Hewitt's unhurried, spacious tempos allow for maximum textural clairty. A sort of Olympian calm reigns over the B flat minor Sonata, allowing the Funeral March to speak with unforced grandeur, and conjuring an ethereal *Presto sotto voce* finale that seems to disappear before it has begun. There's a full-blooded F sharp minor Polonaise with a beguiling *Tempo di mazurka* Trio. The four Preludes from Op 28 recorded here, as well as the F sharp Nocturne, present Hewitt's sharp ear for detail and contour. On the other hand, the F minor Fantasy, like so much of Hewitt's Liszt-playing, strikes as long on dutiful calculation and short on inspiration. Phrasing in the Op 50 Mazurkas seems so similar as to border on the formulaic, de-emphasising the spirit of the dance.

The recorded sound is dimensional and lifelike, though it is difficult to discern if a certain tinny sound in the upper registers is due to the recording itself or a miscalculation in the regulation of the instrument. Audience noise is at a minimum.

Many qualities of the mature pianist are readily recognisable in the 22-year-old contestant, among them careful attention to Chopin's polyphony, with often surprising though natural voice-leading; a deftly calibrated sound palette; and a strong point of view in virtually every work. Hewitt devotees will find this release irresistible, raising the question why, in her mature discography (with the exception of the Nocturnes and Impromptus – Hyperion, 12/04), she has recorded so little Chopin. And, no doubt, all lovers of Chopin will find interesting, even provocative interpretative insights.

Patrick Rucker



The 22-year-old Angela Hewitt in live performances from the 1980 International Chopin Competition

Frescobaldi

Aspice Domine[a]. Canzon prima. Capriccio di durezze. Capriccio sopra la Bassa Fiamenga. Deus noster[a]. Fantasia nona, sopra trè soggietti. Fantasia quarta sopra doi soggietti[b]. Ipsi sum desponsata[a]. Missa della Madonna. Partite sopra La Monica. Recercar quarto, obligo mi, re, fa, mi. Toccata nona. Toccata quinta sopra i pedali per l'organo, e senza

Bernard Foccroulle *orgs* with [a]**Alice Foccroulle** *sop* [b]**Lambert Colson** *cornett*
Ricercar Ⓕ RIC372 (72' • DDD)



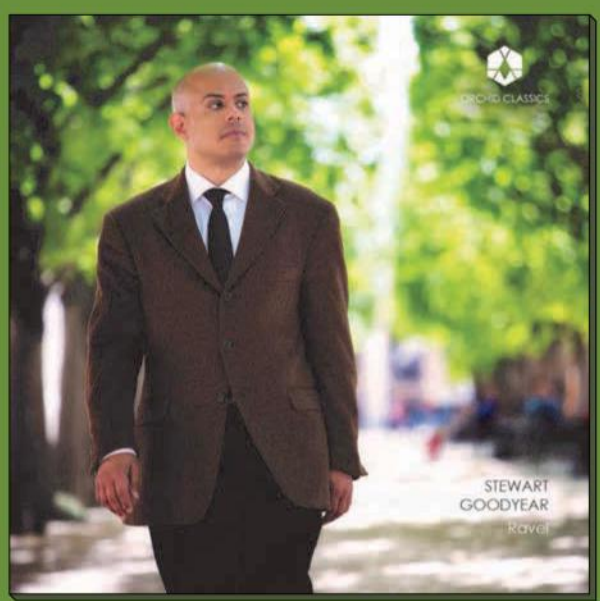
It is heartening to know that Girolamo Frescobaldi's legacy continues some 374 years after his death. Born in Ferrara in 1583, just over a century before JS Bach (who was so smitten with the Italian master's work that he copied out the *Fiori musicali*), his music has, in turn, inspired works by composers as diverse as Respighi, Bartók and Ligeti. Renowned for his contrapuntal mastery and discreet use of dissonance, Frescobaldi developed Renaissance models such as the ricercare and its newer, lighter counterparts, the canzona and capriccio, into highly expressive vehicles. Importantly, he also adopted copperplate engraving for his keyboard scores, surely an encouragement to be more stylistically florid.

On this disc Frescobaldi is mostly in devotional mood, providing short movements with nothing lasting more than seven minutes. He could have wished for no more persuasive an advocate than Bernard Foccroulle who, once again, has meticulously matched his repertory to a trio of historically correct Italian organs. Despite their bijou

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'Technical perfection allied to insight': Jean-Efflam Bavouzet recording Haydn with producer Rachel Smith

dimensions (none containing no more than 10 stops) they each have a distinctive character. The oldest (1509), in the church of St Francesco in Trevi, takes the lion's share of the programme. However, Rome's Santa Barbara dei Librari (*c*1600) is the setting for the extraordinarily rich and adventurous *Toccata quinta* and the exhilarating *Toccata nona* (both 1627), which rounds off the programme.

If an hour of early 17th-century organ music seems too much of a good thing, fortunately Foccroulle's daughter, Alice, sings three soprano motets taken from the *Liber secundus sacrarum modulationum* collection. Her dulcet tone provides a soothing contrast to some of the astringency of the untempered organ ranks. Further variety is provided by Lambert Colson and his mournful cornett in the *Fantasia quarta* of 1608.

Although the accompanying documentation is helpful, there are two annoying mistakes in the track-listing.

Malcolm Riley

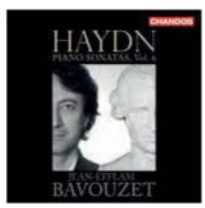
Haydn

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 6'

Piano Sonatas – HobXVI/2; HobXVI/21; HobXVI/28; HobXVI/33; HobXVI/43

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Chandos Ⓕ CHAN10942 (83' • DDD)



Haydn's reputation as a competent pianist but no wizard is surely correct; he appears never to have stepped forwards to present himself as a performer of his own solo pieces, and that probably accounts a good deal for the fact that they still live in the shadow of Mozart's. Yet the piano was at the centre of his life, the instrument at which he improvised and tested all his ideas as part of his morning routine, and in writing music for it he was interested in the expressive possibilities that the developing fortepiano was opening up. The 60-odd sonatas represent some of the most ambitious keyboard music of their time, and virtuosity was always an element of it.

I've always loved it and have been admiring of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's Chandos series for promoting – in his description – 'the boundless treasures of this sublime music'. He has done so at a level of technical perfection allied to insight, rigorous intellectual curiosity and the probing instincts of a distinguished performer that have never been brought to bear so acutely and consistently on this part of Haydn's activity. Sometimes the music doesn't look much on the page; some pianists regard the writing as relatively undeveloped, compared with Mozart's or Clementi's, and others have been perplexed by the fact that it doesn't display a continuous stylistic development. Lay this baggage aside and listen to these five nicely programmed sonatas, none of which is often encountered in recitals. You catch Haydn's adventurous spirit and humanity straight away; only he could have written them.

The B flat Sonata, HobXVI/2, is the earliest in this grouping and may date from 1762. It's a lovely piece with a *Largo* second movement in G minor and a Trio section in B flat minor of the final Minuet that must have gladdened Brahms's heart. Haydn at this time was reaping the harvest of his studies of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the *Treatise on the True Art of Keyboard Playing* as well as CPE's compositions. Haydn admired him as 'the father of us all'.

In our turn we credit Haydn as the father of the symphony and the string quartet, yet we should not forget what he did for the piano sonata – neither Mozart nor Beethoven would have neglected to. The other four pieces here show his burgeoning range. The E flat Sonata No 28 explores brilliance and what the piano in the 1770s could inspire a composer to write; E flat minor appears for the Trio section of the Minuet, so fast-forward again to Brahms. Honour that man for championing his great predecessor when the 19th century had all but forgotten him. The closer one looks at No 43 in A flat, which appears at the outset to be content to please rather than astonish, the more characteristic it appears, with its *pianissimo* chords in a low register ending the first movement, the play of texture and sonority, the pauses, the little oppositions of sound and silence, the air of conversation and the bagatelle-like middle movement.

Faithful as always to Potton Hall in Suffolk, Bavouzet made the recording there last December. I had a moment of thinking the sound a mite clinical. I don't think so now: wonderfully clean as his playing is, there is always warmth and a host of qualities that make his fingers sing and speak and entertain the way they do. There is nothing otiose or vacuous but he has the gift of making Haydn smile at us. With all repeats, the sonatas pan out at approximately 15 minutes each, which seems to me right. He is concerned that repeats should never be straightforward rhetorical formalities and varies them with an armoury of ornaments, mini-cadenzas and little textual 'adjustments'. Better still, he knows when to stand back and do nothing. He writes about the why and wherefore of all this in the booklet.

The thicket of numerals attendant on any presentation of Haydn sonatas, thanks to the two divergent chronological numbering systems in use, is explained by Marc Vignal in another written contribution. Necessary to have, I daresay, but not compelling reading for most punters. Don't let it put you off from getting to the music.

Stephen Plaistow

Liszt/Tausig

Eine Faust-Symphonie, S108

István Lajkó *pf*

Hungaroton Ⓕ HCD32792 (74' • DDD)



The hotbed of creativity that surrounded Liszt in Weimar between 1848 and 1861 is difficult to imagine today. Embarking on the most fruitful stage of his career as a composer, Liszt was also producing and conducting works by his contemporaries and predecessors, writing polemics in support of new music and decisively shaping the careers of a handful of talented young artists. His most prized pupils in those years were Hans von Bülow of Dresden and Carl Tausig, who, at the age of 13, arrived from Warsaw and remained with Liszt in Weimar until 1858. Something of the spirit of that special place and time is captured in this remarkable release of Liszt's *A Faust Symphony*, transcribed for solo piano by the 16-year-old Tausig and recorded for the first time by the Hungarian pianist István Lajkó.

The transcription itself is something of a marvel. Tausig's renderings of Liszt's two symphonies and a number of the symphonic poems survive in various states of completion. In the case of *Faust*, the second movement, 'Gretchen', remained fragmentary in Tausig's manuscript. However, remedy is provided by Liszt's own 1867 solo arrangement of the movement. Overall, compared with later transcriptions of Liszt's orchestral music by Stradal, Klauser, Stark and others, Tausig's *Faust* is in a class by itself. Its resourceful evocations of complex orchestral textures are boldly original and unfailingly pianistic, exploiting the instrument's potential without exceeding it. Meanwhile, the virtuoso demands made on the pianist over the course of nearly an hour and a quarter are formidable.

These are admirably met in Lajkó's reverent, imaginative and thoughtful performance. His inerrant sense of pacing charts the narrative thread through the individual movements even as it throws Liszt's towering architecture into vivid relief. The ominous sense of ambiguity created by the opening measures' augmented triads, so prominent in the 'Faust' movement's orchestral garb, here permeates the entire symphony. Faust's despair, ambition, courage and corruptibility are conjured by a keen delineation of the thematic material, subtle articulation, an acute rhythmic sense and an exquisitely blended colour palette. The portrait of Gretchen is a well of purest water, pellucid textures, delicate and longing. And, as you wonder what could possibly be left, Lajkó ratchets into yet higher gear for a lurid 'Mephistopheles', whose mockery becomes, in the tremendous fugue, menacing. Finally he succeeds in what eludes many conductors: a credible and perfectly calibrated transition to the 'Chorus mysticus', which in turn spirals upwards, transfigured and serene, to the ethereal realms.

This is heady stuff. With genuine understanding and astonishing confidence, Lajkó pulls off what surely will be considered a career-defining achievement. Hungaroton's presentation is at one with the performance. The engineers have encompassed Lajkó's infinitely varied yet always natural piano sound in beautiful detail. Zsuzsanna Domokos explores the story of this little-known manuscript in a compelling booklet essay.

Despite his early death, Tausig's position in the history of pianism has never been in doubt. Joachim called him 'the greatest pianist before the public today' and Liszt considered Tausig the most talented of all his pupils. Experiencing Lajkó's superb realisation of Tausig's brilliant transcription removes any sense of hyperbole from those encomia. **Patrick Rucker**

Paganini

'Bel canto'

Paganini Caprices, Op 1. Caprice d'adieu. Duo merveille, Op 6. Introduction and Variations on 'Nel cor più non mi sento' from Paisiello's La molinara **Pine** Introduction, Theme and Variations on 'God Defend New Zealand'

Rachel Barton Pine *vn*

Avie Ⓜ ② AV2374 (123' • DDD)



'I rather assumed that the sound would be unique right from the start', recalled Robert Schumann of Paganini's playing. 'Nothing of the kind! He began with a tone so thin, so small! Then effortlessly, almost imperceptibly, he cast his magnetic chains.' But that was a live performance. Recordings make different demands, and from the opening flourish of Paganini's Variations on an air by Paisiello, Rachel Barton Pine's tone is lustrous. The dramatic timing of each gesture, the firm, burnished middle register, the gleaming, liquid evanescence of Paganini's stratospheric flights: it's all there.

Virtuosity is a minimum entry requirement in this repertoire. But any violinist who tackles Paganini also has to reach some accommodation with the invisible presence and peerless charisma of the man himself. Pine calls her collection 'Bel canto', and that's what she gives us in her performances of his 24 Caprices. Don't expect the hectic, larger-than-life bravura of, say, Itzhak Perlman's 1972 account (though Pine cites it as an inspiration). Pine is principally interested in the musical



'Beguiling characterisation': Rachel Barton Pine brings lustrous tone and a rich range of colours to Paganini's Caprices

qualities of these extraordinary, endlessly inventive miniatures, and there's hardly a moment here where you get any sense of technique taking precedence over expression.

Instead, Pine finds a wonderfully rich range of colours. Double-stopped octaves can almost vanish into the melody (as in No 7), give a fanfare figure a heroic echo (Nos 19 and 23) or throw an eerie shadow like some operatic mad scene (No 15) – as the music demands. Her characterisation is beguiling: Pine lets minor-key melodies droop to a finish, plays teasingly with the rhythmic sideslips of No 13 and makes the famous left-hand pizzicato in No 24 burst like popping candy. And, of course, she sings her heart out with a big, juicy operatic vibrato in the *amoroso* No 21.

The set spreads over two discs. Pine is generous with repeats (Caprice No 4 extends to nearly 11 minutes, against Perlman's 6'24"), and characterful performances of two more Paganini miniatures plus her own delightful variations on *God Defend New Zealand* (an encore piece for an antipodean tour) serve as encores: just as entertaining, and every bit as warmly communicative. **Richard Bratby**

Selected comparison:

Perlman (6/72R, 10/77R) (WARN) 2564 61303-4

PHOTOGRAPHY: LOU BRUTUS

Ravel · Scriabin

Ravel Miroirs **Scriabin** Piano Sonatas – No 3, Op 23; No 10, Op 70

Andrew Tyson *pf*

Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA277 (59' • DDD)



Andrew Tyson keeps his headstrong and occasionally restless interpretative temperament in focus throughout most of his second solo CD, in contrast to his fascinating yet all-over-the-place Chopin Preludes debut release (ZZT, 3/15). He brings out all the theatricality and wide dynamic contrasts in the first movement of Scriabin's Third Sonata while maintaining a fluid basic pulse. In the *Allegretto*, Tyson eschews the 'traditional' heaving and sighing à la Gilels and Zhukov; the bass line's anapaest rhythm takes on a pointed sprint in the manner of Ashkenazy. The translucently nuanced *Andante* assiduously dovetails into a finale that observes the music's fiery surface like an astute photographer, rather than jumping into the pyre. The Tenth Sonata's celebrated chains of trills emerge more like Hamelin's fireflies than Horowitz's flames, mainly because Tyson colourfully juggles the textural strands with little recourse to the sustain pedal, rendering the music uncommonly clear yet without a trace of dryness.

What an intriguing juxtaposition to have Ravel's *Miroirs* sandwiched between the Scriabin sonatas. A number of recent recordings have raised the bar in terms of finely honed articulation and tonal shading. Tyson sets a fast tempo for 'Noctuelles' and rarely veers from it, making interpretative points through accentuation and dynamic gradation. For all the pianistic finesse of 'Oiseaux tristes', Tyson never plays softly enough to convey the music's inherent lyrical character. His brisk pace for 'Une barque sur l'océan' doesn't allow the arpeggios to ebb and flow like (you guessed it) ocean waves. Similarly, the sultry subtext of 'Alborada gel gracioso' eludes Tyson's supple yet overly fast fingers.

By contrast, Herbert Schuch, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Steven Osborne (among many others) hit upon tempos that enable the hemiola rhythms to really breathe, while imparting sharper definition and direction to the notorious repeated notes. However, the tolling long notes and murmuring triplet figures throughout

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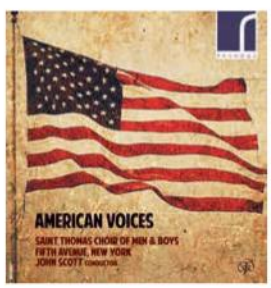
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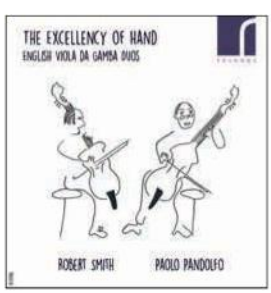


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'True lyrical gift': Javier Perianes plays Schubert with his customary elegance

'La vallée des cloches' are layered in Technicolor perspective. Not everything Tyson does will suit every taste, yet his stunning keyboard mastery and strong personality undoubtedly command attention in this superbly engineered, fulsomely annotated release. **Jed Distler**

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 15, D664; No 21, D960
Javier Perianes *pf*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMM90 2282 (63' • DDD)



Nine years have passed since Javier Perianes's first disc of Schubert and here he programmes two utterly opposing sonatas, the compact and songful D664 with the mighty B flat, D960. Both works are characterised by fine pacing (it's no accident that was he was a student of Richard Goode), with a genial account of the first movement of the A major Sonata that doesn't lack for firepower in its dramatic outburst near the start of the development (4'07"). If Perianes slightly underplays the slow movement's poignant qualities (listen to Lupu here), in his Rondo finale he characterises well the contrast between its playful and assertive elements.

This is but a *petit four*, placed as it is after the epic D960. Perianes is fundamentally an elegant pianist, one who lets the music speak for itself, so the *Molto moderato* first movement (with exposition repeat) unfolds at an entirely natural pace, with some lovely delicate touches. However, in the development he tends to be a little low-voltage and the silences – such a potent element in this movement – pass for relatively little; the closing moments, though, are beautifully considered. There's a slightly restricted colour palette in the *Andante sostenuto*, and others find a more obsessive quality to the repeated left-hand motif – Pires, for instance, who is wonderfully expressive.

Again, Perianes's scherzo doesn't have the range of colours of Uchida or Lupu and is a relatively unshadowed affair. His finale sets off at a good pace but the minor-key outburst (2'33") sounds slightly hectoring. However, this is not the fault of the pianist, for there are moments where the top range of the piano sounds distinctly stressed. It's also a recording close enough to catch the odd sigh (eg track 6, 2'21" and 2'43"). But, that said, Perianes is an artist with a true lyrical gift. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:
Lupu (11/94[R], 3/06) (DECC) 475 7074DC4
Sonata No 21 – selected comparisons:
Uchida (8/98[R]) (DECC) 475 6282PB8
Pires (5/13) (DG) 477 8107GH

Schumann

Fantasie, Op 17. Kreisleriana, Op 16
Jean-Philippe Collard *pf*
La Dolce Volta Ⓕ LDV30 (64' • DDD)



Jean-Philippe Collard's discography is weighted toward his compatriots, including much-lauded Fauré and Saint-Saëns, but during the 1970s he made several interesting Schumann recordings that confirm his secure technical mastery, musical originality and deep feeling for this composer. His most recent La Dolce Volta disc, containing the *Fantasie* and *Kreisleriana*, allows us to hear his take on

PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIEL GARCIA BRUNO

GRAMOPHONE *DVD Focus*

MAXIMUM REGER

Rob Cowan relishes the opportunity to immerse himself in the music of Max Reger, with this superb one-stop introduction to the composer



The Diogenes Quartett, with Roland Glassl and Wen-Sinn Yang, perform Reger's String Sextet Op 118

Many years ago my friend and *Gramophone* colleague Andrew Achenbach suggested a ploy for tracking me down should I ever fall out of favour with the law: send them round to London's major classical CD stores and my fingerprints will almost certainly be the only ones in the Reger racks. An affectionate thought and not too far from the truth, at least so far as my devotion to Reger's music is concerned.

Will Fraser's 'Maximum Reger', for me an answer to a prayer, is an obvious labour of love and I think it fair to say that in musical terms no labour is more deserving of love than Reger's life and work. One hundred and one years after his death he still remains a comparative enigma, celebrated as a genius by Hindemith and Schoenberg, a musical colossus whose output of near-on 1000 pieces deserves, even invites, the closest scrutiny. Speaking personally, I can rarely resist the waves of modulation that characterise his best work, like an ecstatic hippo rolling in mud, the way he ferries me from key to key with surprises virtually by the bar; but I appreciate that others would rather not be surprised, even disorientated, in quite the same way.

A possible clue for his continuing lack of wider appeal may lie with the beautiful Aria from the Suite for violin and piano, Op 103 (included both in full and in the last part of the set's three-part documentary 'Max Reger: The Last Giant'). It opens simply, in the manner of Bach's celebrated Air from the D major Suite, but then so does Reynaldo Hahn's exquisite mélodie 'À Chloris'. The difference between the two is in the subsequent degree of musical discursiveness that Reger allows himself and that Hahn avoids. Now I'm not saying that this is necessarily a bad thing. Reger's Aria is infused with a spirit of deep emotion, whereas Hahn keeps his powder dry. Different universes, I suppose.

Time and again throughout this set works are illustrated, most of them inhabiting the realms of organ or chamber music, that reach out with a degree of modulatory boldness unknown to man until Reger's arrival on this planet. Superb organists such as Bernhard Buttmann, Bernhard Haas and Graham Barber present some of Reger's finest pieces (played on different instruments), Haas and Barber helping to explain their appeal and inherent difficulties – conceptually rather than technically – while the pioneering pianist/conductor Ira Levin further explains elements of the Reger phenomenon, presenting his own orchestration of the *Beethoven* Variations, which many consider to be Reger's crowning achievement in the genre, in alternation with variations from the piano original.

Nervous and compulsive, sensitive to criticism and addicted to drink as he was, Reger nonetheless managed to carry on regardless. Levin illustrates his near bipolar stylistic extremes by playing part of the Serenade's entrancing first movement then switching to some of Reger's most dissonant organ-writing. Haas reminds us that Reger anticipates Strauss's terrifying *Elektra* chord (many years before it was composed) while throughout the documentary Reger expert Professor Susanne Popp of the Reger Institute draws on key elements of the composer's biography, his love of family (he had two adopted daughters), his complex personality and the way he related to those around him. The issue of Reger and 'the symphony' raises more interesting questions: he didn't write one – or did he? The Symphonic Prologue, Sinfonietta, Serenade, Sextet and other large-scale works could be considered symphonies with diverted agendas.

The music selections presented by 'Maximum Reger' number among their contents such masterpieces as the *Böcklin Suite*, the String Sextet, two of the string quartets and numerous songs (in dedicated interpretations by Frauke May), performed by many gifted artists, the likes of Markus Becker (whose excellent set of the complete piano music is now available at super-budget price from NCA), cellist Julius Berger, violinist Sayaka Shoji and the Aris Quartet, whose leader Katharina Wildermuth is especially compelling. All these players and many more seem dedicated to promoting Reger's musical cause. It's just a shame there wasn't room for the Op 109 Quartet, the Ballet Suite, *Hiller* and *Mozart* Variations or *Suite in the Olden Style*. Whenever I'm on a Reger crusade, these are the works I tend to use to help fight his cause. Still, there's more than enough great music to be getting on with, much of it out of the top drawer, and you can always take my prompt for extra repertoire with various bargain CDs or box-sets (Warner's eight-CD 'Centenary Collection' – 12/16 – for example).

Those of us who love Reger are disillusioned virtually on a daily basis by watching otherwise friendly eyes glaze over whenever his name is mentioned. The sad fact is that any composing genius who fights shy of the avant-garde while remaining eminently listenable is bound to suffer slings and arrows from conservatives on the one hand and modernists on the other. But Max Reger was far too original to fit into either camp, which is why I strongly recommend you jump straight in with 'Maximum Reger'. G

THE RECORDING



Maximum Reger
Various performers
Fugue State Films
Ⓕ ⑥ DVD FSFDVD011

these two 1838 masterpieces, with their respective dedications to Liszt and Chopin, as well as to assess how Collard's approach to Schumann has evolved in the ensuing decades.

Two striking features of this recording are the sheer beauty and health of Collard's sound at the instrument, lovingly captured last year at the recently opened Cité de la Musique et de la Danse in Soissons, and the attentive foregrounding of Schumann's vaunted 'inner voices'. The former precludes excessive speed and stridency, while the latter has the subliminal effect of making these readings seem thoroughly rooted and substantial.

Rootedness, however, is not the first thing one listens for in *Kreisleriana*. One of the aspects that made Nicholas Angelich's recent recording so fascinating was its willingness to explore the darkest, neurosis-infested corners of this mercurial work. Collard's interpretation could stand as the diametric opposite. Certainly far from sunny, it nevertheless plots a progress that never seems willing to sacrifice clarity or coherence for the grotesque.

The full-blooded, torrential first movement of the C major *Fantasie* is largely straightforward, with a thrust that seldom slows for reflection. The notorious leaps at the end of the second movement are perhaps the sanest I've heard. Not precipitously fast, though no less exciting for it, they are prepared by an intense focus on the inner voices in the passages immediately beforehand, so that when the contrary leaps occur, they seem more an overflowing of joy, than an explosion of pianistic athleticism. Perhaps even more remarkably, the final movement eschews visionary mysticism, opting instead for a narrative directly sung, guileless, unaffected, yet deeply poetic. Here too, the inner voices are given full play in what ultimately is a very satisfying reading. **Patrick Rucker**

Kreisleriana – selected comparison:
Angelich (7/16) (ERAT) 9029 59906-7

Stanford

38 Preludes from the two sets of Twenty-Four Preludes in all the Keys for Pianoforte, Opp 163 & 179
Sam Haywood *pf*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68183 (70' • DDD)



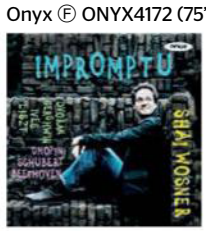
PHOTOGRAPHY: MIHAI ANDREI

Towards the end of his life Stanford wrote two sets of 24 Preludes for piano boasting impeccable craft and characteristic resourcefulness as well as a most satisfying diversity of mood and genre. The key-scheme matches that of Bach's '48', and the present Hyperion survey contains all but 10 pieces from both books. From the First Set of 1918 I'd single out the charmingly capricious Humoresque (No 9), powerfully elegiac No 16, marked *Adagio (con Fantasia)* and an Irish lament or 'Caoine' in all but name, and deeply felt March (No 22) which – like the composer's enviably taut Third Piano Trio from the same year – bears a dedication to the memory of Maurice Gray (son of Alan Gray, Stanford's organist colleague at Trinity College, Cambridge). Finished some time around 1921, the Second Set likewise contains its fair share of treasures, not least the sanguine swagger of the E major *Alla marcia* (No 33), moody, barcarolle-like No 36 in F minor (echoes here of both Chopin and Fauré), noble Chaconne in F sharp minor (No 38), winsome Musette (No 42) and lofty A major *Alla sarabanda* (No 43). The valedictory final piece (appropriately entitled 'Addio') proves enormously touching.

Sam Haywood (a pupil of Paul Badura-Skoda and Maria Curcio, and regular chamber partner to – among others – Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis) does this repertoire absolutely proud; possessing a pleasingly rounded tone, sensitivity to dynamic nuance and flawless technical address, his is a decidedly superior brand of pianism. Exemplary sound (Ben Connellan) and scholarly annotation (Jeremy Dibble) offer additional incentive to check out this most rewarding issue. **Andrew Achenbach**

'Impromptu'

Beethoven Fantasy, Op 77 **Chopin** Three Impromptus **Dvořák** Impromptu, B129 **Gershwin** Impromptu in Two Keys **Ives** Improvisations – No 1; No 3 **Liszt** Impromptu (Nocturne), S191 **Schubert** Impromptus, D935
Shai Wosner *pf*
Onyx Ⓕ ONYX4172 (75' • DDD)



Lest anyone harbour reservations about Shai Wosner's gifts as an imaginative programmer, this CD should lay them to rest. Using Schubert's second set of Impromptus and three of Chopin's eponymous works as connective tissue, he has juxtaposed a series of pieces, ranging from Beethoven to Gershwin, resulting in a veritable feast of spontaneity.

Those familiar with Wosner's two previous CDs, devoted primarily to Schubert, will find in these D935 Impromptus the same heartfelt lyricism and ultra-refined pianism. In the F minor First, the opening material grows increasingly articulate, with gently lilting tremolo figurations floating beatifically above. The hand-crossing dialogue (2'43") is especially ardent in its longing. The eloquent A flat Second holds its *cantabile* aloft as if on a cloud. Yet, if one were to quibble in the face of such musical and pianistic wealth, Wosner's burnished, poised surfaces can obscure a more robust, masculine Schubert, a man subject to mercurial passions who never strays far from the vital roots of Austrian folk music. One could wish that passages evoking yodelling were earthier, repetitive rhythmic figures in the *Rosamunde* variations more rambunctious, or the flight from the Furies in the final F minor Impromptu more driven.

This abundance of finesse suits the Chopin Impromptus admirably, revealing something akin to epiphanic joy. In Op 29, melancholy mitigates higher spirits naturally and seamlessly. Op 36 exudes morning freshness with gentle sweetness, all the more vivid for the Trio's ecstatic heroism. The whole emerges with a psychological cohesion rarely encountered in this piece.

Of the other pieces – dreamy Liszt, searchingly expressive Ives, smart Gershwin and Dvořák's gentle disquietude – the Beethoven Fantasy warrants special mention. Wosner vividly suggests the white-hot inspiration that we know from historical accounts to have been a quality of Beethoven's improvisations. This reading couldn't sound more original or spontaneous had it been created on the spot.

All is faithfully captured by producer and engineer Simon Kiln. Wosner's abandonment of the still prevalent lexigraphic programming practices of so many classical recordings is laudable. It demonstrates that, along with fresh perspectives, unusual juxtapositions, effected with intelligence and taste, may yield a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Don't miss this satisfying listen!
Patrick Rucker

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LP RELEASES

An opera box, a picture disc, new artists and a handful of classic reissues reviewed by **Peter Quantrill**

The art of vinyl

When Sony Classical announced a new **Mozart**/da Ponte cycle with the maverick Teodor Currentzis, all three operas were initially advertised with LP versions. Perhaps understandably, *Figaro* and *Così* never made it to market on vinyl, but Sony has blown the budget on *Don Giovanni*, which retails at around £50: a comparatively reasonable sum when you take into consideration the no-expense-spared production values. A matt black box has swanky if illegible black gloss titling. Inside are four 180gm LPs and a hefty booklet on thick, high-laminate paper, containing essays, synopsis and libretto in four languages.

As for the recording itself, on-stage microphones at the opera house in Perm catch every gasp and gabble and mutter – and on occasion some airy *leggiero* singing, especially from Kenneth Tarver as Don Ottavio – while from some Stygian depth beneath them, violins and oboe emerge distinct but distant. Hearing this, Walter Legge would have conniptions. A recent survey of LP buying habits found that a dismaying proportion of new LPs are bought and never played, destined to lean artlessly against coffee tables as cultural signifiers. This *Don Giovanni* may regrettably count among their number.

One sidebar of LP history that never took off in the classical world was the picture disc. Everyone from Manilow to Bananarama released their albums on limited-edition picture vinyl, but punk and metal bands went to town and came home again with apocalyptic fantasies in black and purple. The X-ray image of a lower spine and pelvis may appear tame by comparison, but the Warner Classics 'Record Store Day' release of **Shostakovich**'s Second Cello Concerto, played at its premiere by Mstislav Rostropovich, is a boutique piece of gramophone history. 'Roentgenizdat' published bootleg recordings on discarded X-ray film. Wisdom holds that picture discs sound worse – the wax layer on top of the image is susceptible to damage – not such a problem with a serviceable, in-house mono recording.

Deserving more than ornamental status is Telarc's return to vinyl with the soundtrack recording of **Tchaikovsky**'s *The Nutcracker*, originally recorded by the LSO and Sir Charles Mackerras for the 1986 film with designs by Maurice Sendak, and now reissued with the highly collectable catalogue number of TEL00001. As a further enticing, retro touch, the back cover is emblazoned with the company's old rider along the lines of 'This recording is so good it may blow up your hi-fi', which even in the early days of jittery and wallet-busting CD hardware I took to be a piece of canny marketing rather than a genuine warning. The performance itself challenges the LSO and Previn for top spot in my personal *Nutcracker* pantheon: effervescent, probably undanceable at points, with every brushstroke of Tchaikovsky's orchestration relished by both musicians and engineers.

After the DG reissue of *Drumming* (A/16), a new recording of **Reich** from LSO Live prompts me to observe how suited minimalism is to the LP carrier. Less because of the congruence of their hipster appeal than the almost-tangible presence of textures – wood, metal, string, and hands in the case of *Clapping Music* – that a well-pressed LP can deliver. The acoustic of LSO St Luke's lends just enough bloom to the LSO Percussion Ensemble without compromising the cumulative momentum of Sextet, making a fine complement to the much closer studio-engineered sound of the composer-led recording on Nonesuch.

Two new albums of piano music by Philip Glass present a study in contrasts. The **'80th Anniversary Tribute'** gathers material from several albums by Nicolas Horvath on the Grand Piano label, leading to awkward changes of acoustic and instrument from track to track. Horvath's touch is none too sensitive; even the gatefold is miscut. In every way, Vikingur Olafsson's new album of *Etudes* on DG is a classier production, ebbing and flowing without undue recourse to pedal. A DG reissue of the composer's Violin Concerto brings back one of the composer's most harmonically diverse and successful concert-hall works (coupled with the *Concerto Grosso* No 5 of Alfred Schnittke) – again, the pristine surfaces lend a beguiling sheen to the Vienna Philharmonic's backing, while Gidon Kremer's solo part benefits from a profile more sharply outlined than the original mastering for CD.

A clutch of recent DG releases discloses complementary approaches to **Chopin**. Forty-five years on, Maurizio Pollini's *Etudes* have lost none of their power to astonish, with velocity and finesse still unrivalled except perhaps by Pollini himself in his earlier (less well-balanced) recording for EMI, which finally appeared on Testament in 2004. On an A-B comparison between the original 1972 pressing and the replica reissue, the piano sound is, if anything, even richer and more robust. The microphones stepped back a touch for Pollini's Polonaises in 1976, though the unmannered force and sprung rhythms of his playing are no less formidable.

On his debut album for the yellow label, Seong-Jin Cho (recently welcomed by Jeremy Nicholas, 1/17) brings a more flexibly shaded rubato to the Ballades and the First Piano Concerto, where the piano is set more within the body of the orchestra than is customary, offsetting some unusually detailed accompaniment from the LSO and Gianandrea Noseda. Rather unfairly, however, DG has issued at the same time the 2007 recording of both concertos with Krystian Zimerman and his bespoke Polish Festival Orchestra. Like Pollini's Etudes, these uniquely probing recordings have retained the shock of the new, though in the very broad outlines of both opening movements perhaps one has to know the composer as well as Zimerman in order fully to feel the expressive necessity of every pause for thought.

Back to a set of vinyl that's a work of art in itself: another DG replica, of **Bach**'s cello suites with Pierre Fournier,



painstakingly reproduced in a cloth-bound box and full Archiv livery. Half a century of scholarship has not dimmed the value of Erich Hoflein's extensive, illuminating booklet essay. The 'intensity that Fournier brings to virtually every note', observed by Rob Cowan in February's 'Classics Reconsidered', comes from a world no less distant to modern Bach performance than the ruminative Romantic approach of Rostropovich. The regular tactus and plain-speaking authority of the French cellist in even the slower dance movements permit each suite to fill a single side.

Like Telarc, Oehms has made a well-chosen entry to the LP market. **'Ballo Turco'** brings together Italian and Ottoman composers of the early Baroque, in lively, vibrantly coloured performances by an East-meets-West period-instrument ensemble of Italian and Turkish musicians, very closely recorded in an Istanbul studio. Useful documentation but no sung text is printed on the gatefold. Alpha has done likewise in reissuing **'La Tarantella'**, an early classic (2002) of the vernacular early-music album which brought the many talents of Christina Pluhar to wider attention. Two LPs accommodate 51 minutes of songs and dances from 17th-century Puglia; barely have you settled to enjoy one side than you must leap up and turn it over, and Alpha's transfer of a sparkling **Telemann** album from Il Giardino Armonico is similarly casual: a C major recorder concerto is split not over sides but between LPs.

The presentation of four more Berlin Classics reissues from the East-German Eterna catalogue is up to the standards of the first batch (A/16) though quality control has slipped: a superfluous label had to be peeled from one disc before it could be played. A short-measure LP of David and Igor Oistrakh playing 'double' violin concertos by **Bach** and **Vivaldi** exerts only passing claims on the attention thanks to aggressively front-loaded balances and a thumping accompaniment from the Leipzig Gewandhaus and Franz Konwitschny. Orchestra and conductor give a fine, common-sense account of **Brahms** from 1962, in a First Symphony which drowns under the waves of reverberation through Leipzig's Heilandskirche. Fast forward 21 years and the orchestra's principal cellist, Jürnjakob Timm, is a refined soloist in the **Schumann** Concerto and **Tchaikovsky** *Rococo* Variations though any flights of invention are hampered by Kurt Masur's business-like direction. From 1984 but still in analogue, **Berlioz**'s *Symphonie fantastique* from the unlikely source of the Dresden Philharmonic is more satisfying in every way. Herbert Kegel integrates Berlioz's controversially slow metronome marks within a theatrically produced (deploying the bells of the Lukaskirche in the finale!), credibly idiomatic reading that swings from late-Beethovenian contemplation to snarling parody.

'Dolce Vita' is an astutely programmed tribute to the art of Caruso sure to please diehard fans of Jonas Kaufmann, though how much that group overlaps with classical LP buyers I couldn't say. On vinyl there is a clear difference in acoustic space between the tenor and his accompanists. An inset sheet gives texts and translations and lists a cohort of mixing and mastering engineers. Kaufmann is back on home soil for an LP reissue of his 2013 **Wagner** album, but Decca has done him few favours by squeezing the entire album onto a single LP. In previous roundups I have made complaint about excessively short sides, spreading a 50-minute CD over four LP sides – and there are a few examples here – but the 40-minute Side A requires a boost to the volume which inevitably increases surface noise and occludes Kaufmann's palate of dark timbres.

There is, again, an unfair comparison to be made with BR-Klassik's new LP of hitherto unreleased **Operetta Arias** from Fritz Wunderlich. Recordings from 1959-66 capture the tenor in unforced, unfettered voice, with the Munich Radio Orchestra in its proper place. A certain generation of listeners and critics may wrinkle their noses at some articulating aspirates, but for the joyous immediacy of experience, this LP would be first in my digital basket, quickly followed by Mackerras's *Nutcracker*.

THE RECORDINGS

Mozart Don Giovanni **Currentzis**
Sony Classical ● 88985 31605-1
Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 2 **Rostropovich**
Warner Classics ● 9029 58719-3
Tchaikovsky Nutcracker **Mackerras**
Telarc ● TEL00001
Reich Clapping Music etc **LSO**
LSO Live ● LSO5073LP
Glass 80th Anniversary Tribute **Horvath**
Grand Piano ● GP752LP
Glass Violin Concerto **Kremer**
DG ● 479 6967
Glass Etudes **Olafsson** DG ● 479 7258
Chopin Etudes **Pollini** DG ● 479 6331
Chopin Polonaises **Pollini** DG ● 479 6653
Chopin Piano Concerto No 1, etc **Cho**
DG ● 479 6778
Chopin Piano concertos **Zimerman**
DG ● 479 6871
Bach Cello Suites **Fournier** DG ● 479 6963
'Ballo Turco' Various artists
Oehms ● OC1860
'La Tarantella' Pluhar
Alpha ● ALPHA541
Telemann Il Giardino Armonico
Alpha ● ALPHA254
Bach. Vivaldi Oistrakh
Berlin Classics ● 0300843BC
Brahms Symphony No 1 **Konwitschny**
Berlin Classics ● 0300845BC
Schumann Cello Concerto **Tchaikovsky** Rococo Variations **Timm; Masur**
Berlin Classics ● 0300846BC
Berlioz Symphonie fantastique **Kegel** Berlin Classics ● 0300844BC
'Dolce Vita' Kaufmann
Sony Classical ● 88875 18363-1
Wagner Kaufmann Decca ● 483 0961
Operetta arias Wunderlich
BR-Klassik ● 900315

Giya Kancheli

Philip Clark plumbs the mysteries of this Georgian composer's fascinating, always-questioning music

Previously in this slot I've profiled composers whose roots lie firmly within various shades of modernism – Christopher Fox, Roger Reynolds and James Dillon. You might be thinking that I'm entirely the wrong person to be writing about Giya Kancheli, a composer with a stubborn belief in key signatures and bar-lines, whose music is released on ECM New Series in the same breath as the Holy Minimalism and neo-romanticism of Arvo Pärt, Veljo Tormis and Valentin Silvestrov, and whose work embraces broad-brushstroke tonal sweeps, the folk music of his native Georgia and vocal writing utterly unwilling to surrender the innate expressive grain of the human voice.

It's writing for the voice – a tenor – that opens his Symphony No 3 (1973), the first piece of Kancheli's that I heard after a second-hand CD shop in Brighton dealt up conductor Dzansug Kakhidze's pairing of this symphony with Kancheli's Sixth. At the time, Górecki's own Third Symphony, *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, was riding the wave of its unexpected popularity and you didn't need to be an HC Robbins Landon to hear clear points of convergence between the aesthetics of these two composers. Both moved their symphonic arguments forwards through time using repetitive cycles of bare-bones tonal lines; both men wrote music that was unmistakably east-European in its flavourings of melody and harmony, and its devotional intensity. But whereas a clear functional link existed between voice and orchestra in Górecki's symphony (the orchestration supported the voice; this was a definite 'setting' of a text), Kancheli's symphony never quite revealed exactly why this vulnerable-sounding tenor voice, intoning a wordless chant, should be moving through an orchestral landscape policed by sounds that did anything but support or bolster it.

'Traces of Georgian folk music continue to float like oil in the structural waters of his music without ever sounding nostalgic'

And listening to that same symphony 25 years later, I'm not sure I have any definitive answers to offer – Kancheli's score retains its mystery, holding in scorn the idea of definitive answers. The first instrumental sounds you hear elbow their way past the tenor voice without any transition or preparation. Brutalist brass fanfares hack like shards of glass through the orchestral fabric; loops of string sounds, played *col legno*, begin to twitch obsessively; a prickly flute motif spills notes over the orchestra and then disappears as quickly as it arrived. As the familiar brass material reappears, which under normal circumstances might become a point of structural orientation, Kancheli digs his score deeper into the gestural grass. The nervous ticking of the *col legno* strings stretches towards toneless shivering, reducing the whole orchestra to a harmonic skeleton. An oncoming moment of arrival that Kancheli will never ultimately deliver is implied by string tremolos, which slide the promise of a harmonic resolution forever onwards and upwards – eventually pushing it discreetly off the top of the instrumental frame.

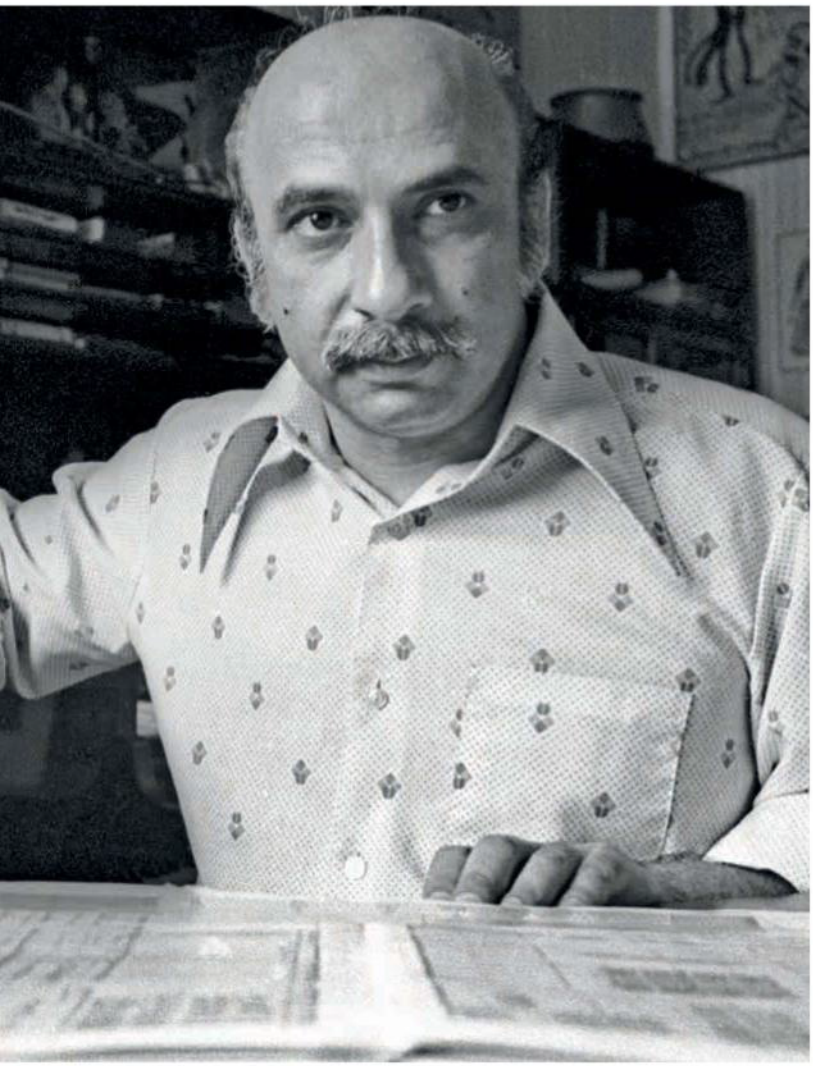
As the voice re-enters and surveys the surrounding chaos, singing variations on the same basic material that opened the symphony, the emotional kickback is both powerful and well judged. From this point onwards Kancheli's tonality starts to find its feet as the harmony becomes more direct and functional. But he resists fully integrating voice and orchestra, while that central question – why? – is never fully answered. (Subliminally, he has set up this opposition from the opening moments of the piece as the tenor voice intones against a virtually silent tremor in the bowels of the orchestra which outlines an alien tonality – but so subtle is the orchestration that the tension is felt rather than explicitly heard.)

Now aged 81, Kancheli lives in Antwerp. Like his friend Schnittke, who removed himself from the political uncertainty of the Soviet Union in 1990 when he relocated to Hamburg, Kancheli left the uneasy atmosphere of his native Georgia in 1991, initially to live in Berlin – and traces of Georgian folk music continue to float like oil in the structural waters of his music without ever sounding dewy-eyed, whimsical or nostalgic. Born in Tbilisi, Kancheli studied composition at the city's conservatoire with Iona Tuskia, a symphonist who bought himself time to write his own music through his prolific output of film and theatre scores, a model that

KANCHELI FACTS

Born Tbilisi, August 10, 1935.
Education Kancheli studied composition at the local Tbilisi Conservatoire with Iona Tuskia, graduating in 1963.
Career He returned to the Tbilisi Conservatoire in 1970 to teach composition.
Breakthrough work Symphony No 3 (1973).
Definitive work *Lament – Music of Mourning in Memory of Luigi Nono* (1994).
Schnittke on Kancheli 'What is most surprising about him is his rare gift of a "floating sense of time"'.
Kancheli on Kancheli 'I'm always in control of the pencil [when composing]. Usually it's considered that geniuses are being led by the pencil. First of all, I don't consider myself a genius, and second, I don't believe this myth of being led by a pencil. Maybe there are some rare moments when the pencil leads you, but I think for the most part, it's the person who is in charge and in control.' (1995)





PHOTOGRAPHY: ITAR-TASS/TOPFOTO/ARENAPAL

Kancheli would emulate. Initially intending to study geology, Kancheli finally emerged with a degree in composition, then earned his living as music director of the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi. And his compositional modus operandi recalls both these formative experiences – the dramatic staging of material arranged in rock-formation-like strata which generate musical landscapes that listeners view from multiple angles, rather than via conventional through-composed narratives.

The switch of geographical setting swung Kancheli's music in a new direction. In 1986, a few years before leaving Georgia, he called time on writing symphonies with No 7, a grand summation he subtitled *Epilogue*. It carried within its structural frame strategically placed flashbacks to his own earlier symphonies and cryptic allusions to Bach and Beethoven, as though the whole symphony had been carved directly on to the unfolding history of music – Kancheli's own personal palimpsest. His earliest symphonies are floridly folkloric, peppered with rhythmic and harmonic bonbons borrowed from neo-classical Stravinsky and Prokofiev. The Fourth Symphony, *To the Memory of Michelangelo* (1974), Fifth, *To The Memory of My Parents* (1977) and Sixth (1978-80) are all built on the discoveries of the Third. His Fifth opens with desolate music for solo harpsichord, a private grieving for his parents that is continually intruded upon as the orchestra flexes its muscle.

Since his move to the West, Kancheli's structural disjoints might have become more manicured and the overall arcs more obviously teleological, but his music has retained its steely objectivity. *Magnum ignotum* (for wind ensemble, double bass and tape), written in 1994 for the Witten New Chamber Music Days (a contemporary music shindig usually associated with its steadfast support of composers like Brian Ferneyhough, Vinko Globokar and Nicolaus A Huber), creates a dialogue between Georgian folk music on tape and real-time instrumental responses. Kancheli's cycle of four works for soloists and ensemble collected under the banner *Life without Christmas* – 'Morning Prayers' (1990), 'Midday Prayers' (1991), 'Evening Prayers' (1991), 'Night Prayers' (1992) – attempts to reconcile the composer's devout Christian faith with the perception that society is increasingly seeking its spiritual nourishment elsewhere. Characteristically, the tone Kancheli adopts avoids high-handed preachiness: when it was adapted for the jazz saxophonist Jan Garbarek, 'Night Prayers' embedded pockets of improvisation inside the score, a venture that, alongside his relentlessly questioning and ambiguous harmonies, symbolised Kancheli's need to keep pressing that same existentialist question: Why?

A series of large-scale concertos written for starry soloists – including Rostropovich, Yuri Bashmet, Kim Kashkashian and Lisa Batiashvili (a double concerto with the oboist François Leleux) – brought Kancheli wider appreciation. But the introverted and defiantly secret inscape of his 44-minute *Lament – Music of Mourning in Memory of Luigi Nono* (1994), written for violinist Gidon Kremer and soprano Maacha Deubner and large orchestra, is his most rewarding and distilled latter-period work. A narrow band of hushed dynamics dims the light and mirrors the mood music of Nono's own later work; but, blinking through the fragments of instrument filigree, stirrings of a harmonic direction begin to gather pace, leading to a final valedictory lament. The music manages to be both musically allusive and emotionally direct – a very rare achievement indeed. G

LISTEN TO KANCHELI

Some works written mainly after his move to the West



Lament – Music of Mourning in Memory of Luigi Nono
Maacha Deubner *sop* Gidon Kremer *vn*
Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra / Jansug Kakhidze
ECM New Series (A/99)
Kancheli's 1994 homage is a delicately achieved score that conveys the spirit of Nono's later-period music through his own techniques.



Simi. Mourned by the Wind
Alexander Ivashkin *vc*
Russian State Symphony Orchestra / Valery Polyansky
Chandos (A/05)
A disc celebrating Kancheli's creative relationship with Mstislav Rostropovich: the single-movement *Simi (Bleak Reflections)* from 1995, followed by the four-movement *Mourned by the Wind (Liturgy in Memory of Givi Ordzhonikidze)* from 1989.



Chiaroscuro. Twilight
Gidon Kremer, Patricia Kopatchinskaja *vns* Kremerata Baltica
ECM New Series
Characteristically meditative works: the profoundly moving *Twilight* (2004) for two violins and orchestra, written as Kancheli was emerging from a period of serious illness; and *Chiaroscuro* (2011) for one violin (Kremer) and orchestra.

Vocal



Richard Wigmore explores the songs of Robert Franz:

'Robin Tritschler's voice is fresh and easy on the ear, produced with a care for clarity of diction and a true singing line' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 75



Ivan Moody on a new recording of Szymanowski's Stabat mater:

'Jacek Kaspszyk directs as though his life depends on it, drawing out every shade and subtlety from the music' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 80

JS Bach

Mass in B minor, BWV232
Julia Doyle *sop* **Alex Potter** *counterten*
Daniel Johannsen *ten* **Klaus Mertens** *bass-bar*
Chorus and Orchestra of the JS Bach Foundation, St Gallen / Rudolf Lutz
JS Bach-Stiftung Ⓕ ② B384 (100' • DDD • T/t)



The paradox of recent performances of this mightiest of Bachian edifices is that as directors seek to be distinctive, almost the reverse seems to be happening in all but a few. Here, you'd be excused for thinking the manufacturers have mixed the masters: instead of a resounding B minor Kyrie chord opening proceedings, we get a little harpsichord improvisation – and rather more of it occurs before the *Credo*.

What other unexpected features are we to expect? The answer is almost nothing; Rudolf Lutz's Bach-Stiftung from St Gallen in Switzerland is studiously un-attention-seeking. Lutz brings considerable logic to each movement, the music always clearly articulated and astutely balanced. The soloists and ensemble perform their duties mostly with aplomb and always with an admirable collective purpose, and the chorus glows at its best.

However, a tendency towards the geometric, even the generic, such as parading foursquare gestures in the 'Crucifixus', is perhaps not as frustrating as an inability to build tension in the choral lines. Both 'Kyrie' choruses are beautifully supple but momentum and direction become sapped as the movements progress. Where Brüggen or Gardiner would identify the organic growth in the counterpoint (the 'Et in terra pax' is always a good assessment point), Lutz is content to allow the music to chug forwards on its own terms.

At times there is much to be said for this hands-off approach since it allows the soloists, especially in the duets, to find an agreeable character and equilibrium. Indeed, Julia Doyle and Alex Potter respond with persuasive readings throughout, and are especially memorable in their respective 'Laudamus te' and 'Qui sedes'. The redoubtable Klaus Mertens is still extraordinarily unaffected in his Bach-singing but the voice is not what it was, and Daniel Johannsen is communicative but precious in the *Benedictus*.

Compared to the technical and musical assurance of the finest European ensembles, the Bach-Stiftung are arguably better endowed in the wind than brass departments. The oboes and flutes are exceptional, but the trumpets are less well integrated into the ensemble and struggle to float and, instead, tend to peck. This performance still offers many fine solo and choral numbers but without, alas, the consequential dimension of recent releases of the Mass. These include Jonathan Cohen's beautifully judged reading, Gardiner's virtuoso 'mathematical proof' and Lars-Ulrik Mortensen's lightly shaded and compelling canvas released last year. As a slightly troubling addendum, the string bass line often spills over into an over-reverberant rumble which should have been identified at post-production stage. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Selected comparisons:
Arcangelo, Cohen (11/14) (HYPE) CDA68051/2
EBS, Gardiner (12/15) (SDG) SDG722
Conc Copenhagen, Mortensen (3/16) (CPO) CPO777 851-2

JS Bach · Pergolesi

JS Bach Cantatas – No 54, Widerstehe doch der Sünde; No 170, Vergnügte Ruh! beliebte Seelenlust! **Pergolesi** Stabat mater[a]
[a]**Lucy Crowe** *sop* **Tim Mead** *counterten*
La Nuova Musica / David Bates
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HM90 7589 (64' • DDD • T/t)



The last few years have been a period of extremes for Pergolesi's *Stabat mater*. High-profile recordings have veered wildly between anachronistic richness and thickly painted vocal lines (Yoncheva and Deshayes on Sony, Netrebko and Pizzolato on DG) and near-anaemic period precision (Lezhneva and Jaroussky on Erato). Anyone longing for a bit more moderation – a performance embracing both the rose and the yew tree in this exquisite Latin hymn – should find plenty to console in this thrilling new recording from La Nuova Musica.

In Lucy Crowe and Tim Mead the ensemble have both period specialists and singers with enough muscle and tone to temper stylistic precision with human drama. Together they lead a performance that is both meditation (a 'Quando corpus morietur' of infinite restraint, whose legatos seem endless; the opening 'Stabat mater dolorosa') and a vivid sacred drama (Crowe's nervy, fretful 'Cujus animam gementem'; the urgency of duet 'Fac, ut ardeat cor meum').

David Bates and his ensemble take an active part in the drama too in a performance that might have its moments of beauty and innocence, but that keeps the image of the bloodied cross, the long walk to Golgotha, ever before your eyes from the dull thud of the opening bass line onwards. Speeds tend to the swift, banishing any thoughts of sentimentality from a performance as sophisticated emotionally as it is musically.

In an intriguing booklet-note, Mark Seow notes that Bach was so taken with the Pergolesi that he arranged it himself. Sadly this curiosity doesn't feature here; instead we get Bach on more familiar ground – solo cantatas 'Widerstehe doch der Sünde' and 'Vergnügte Ruh! beliebte Seelenlust!' performed by Mead. Both showcase a countertenor voice going from strength to strength, powerful but never pushed, pure but not affectedly so. If the phrases span with just a little more freedom, taking away as well as giving, then there would be nothing left to ask. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Selected comparisons:
S Cecilia Orch, Pappano (4/11) (DG) 477 9337GH
Barocchisti, Fasolis (1/14) (ERAT) 319147-2
Ens Amarillis, Gaillard, Cochard (1/17) (SONY) 88985 36964-2



'Stylistic precision and human drama': countertenor Tim Mead with La Nuova Musica's organist Silas Wollston

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123
Carolyn Sampson *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland** *mez* **Thomas Walker** *ten* **David Wilson-Johnson** *bass* **Cappella Amsterdam; Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century / Daniel Reuss**
Glossa Ⓕ GCD921124 (75' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at Tivoli/Vredenburg, Utrecht, Netherlands, October 2016



Listeners initially disconcerted by the smooth legato of the *Kyrie*'s opening statements may be reassured: this is not one of those orotund, peace-to-all-men performances to which the *Missa solemnis* is prone. It took place at the end of a tour of the Netherlands last autumn, in the Grote Zaal of the main performing arts venue in Utrecht: a modern hall, recently renovated, but sounding on the recording like a church far larger than its 1700-seat capacity. Microphone balances home in to catch every sibilant of 'Christe eleison' but they pan out and backwards for the great choral fugues, which come at the listener as if from the other end of an imaginary nave.

A high-definition film of the concert, made by Dutch TV, is available on YouTube. It shows that the membership of the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century has evolved little since Frans Brüggen gathered it together 35 years ago. The ensemble's collective, soft-grained sonority, so different to the Concentus Musicus Wien of similar vintage on Harnoncourt's late-style recording (Sony Classical, 8/16), records well.

If the contribution of Cappella Amsterdam does not rival the phenomenal polish of the Monteverdi Choir for John Eliot Gardiner (SDG, 2/14), it's tempting to observe that the choral writing not only entails but embraces a sense of struggle. Like Hölderlin after him, Beethoven prayed not to plaster saints but to a fleetingly apprehended God of earth and sky. In performing his religious music, a bit of dirt under the fingernails does not go amiss.

On film, Daniel Reuss is an agreeably pragmatic leader, but his reading goes deeper. It is rooted in a solid, not austere string bass that spreads through the *Credo*'s pleas of 'Suscipe' like a late summer sun. He is especially good at paying respect to the heterogeneous idioms of Beethoven's painstakingly assembled inspiration. After a solid start to the *Credo*, Reuss cuts away at 'Et incarnatus' (4'10") to a glimpse of medieval plainsong which no less abruptly segues into contemplations of *Fidelio*, before the magnificent, hanging Baroque suspensions of 'Crucifixus', where vocal and instrumental soloists vie with each other for the most poignantly sustained expression as if in the slow movement of a late quartet. At these points even Gardiner is comparatively literal, while Harnoncourt's team is sourly tuned and muddily recorded.

The soloists blend unusually well, even if Thomas Walker's tenor is a size smaller than the other voices, and David Wilson-Johnson's bass was more focused for Philippe Herreweghe in 2012 (PHI, 3/13). Each makes distinctive contributions – Marianne Beate Kielland especially searing in the *Agnus* – though they struggle against the acoustic in the *Sanctus*. I am especially partial to Reuss's handling of the final bars, *come scritto*, with a flourish that stares into the void. **Peter Quantrill**

Brahms

'Complete Duets & Quartets'
Duets – Op 20; Op 28; Op 61; Op 66. Quartets – Op 31; Op 64; Op 92; Op 112. Balladen und Romanzen, Op 75. Liebesliederwalzer, Op 52. Neue Liebeslieder, Op 65. Zigeunerlieder, Op 103

Juliane Banse *sop* **Ingeborg Danz, Iris Vermillion** *mezs* **Christoph Prégardien, Marcus Ullmann** *ten* **Andreas Schmidt** *bar* **Helmut Deutsch, Wolfram Rieger** *pfs*
CPO Ⓜ ③ CPO777 537-2 (149' • DDD • T/t)



CPO's complete Brahms song series started as long ago as the early '90s, and the sessions for this release – a substantial appendix to that 10-disc project – date from between 1997 and 2003. Anyone who's been sticking with the whole survey will no doubt want to snap it up, and it's also a useful collection for people wanting to explore Brahms's vocal ensembles from the starting point of the oft-recorded sets of *Liebesliederwalzer* (happily CPO provides full texts and English translations).

As with those works, this is mainly Brahms in relaxed, easy-going vein, pieces primarily written for domestic – or at least amateur – performance. Gentle inspiration is the order of the day, rather than towering manifestations of genius. In fact, the lighter numbers tend to be the most successful: such joyous ditties as 'Die Schwestern' from Op 61 (a little like a 'Three little maids from school' *avant la lettre*) or the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*-derived 'Guter Rat' (Op 75) are more fun for listeners and, one suspects, performers than such melodramatic ballads as 'Walpurgisnacht' or the earnest 'Edward', also from Op 75.

There are 'gypsy song' arrangements – also great fun – as well as full-fat Brahmsian delights, such as 'O schöne Nacht' from Op 92 or 'Phänomen' (Op 61); the Op 64 Quartets strike me as a particularly seductive mixture of the Schubertian and the unmistakably Brahmsian.

Andreas Schmidt, Juliane Banse and Helmut Deutsch have been the stalwarts of the series, and they form the core of the personnel in performances that are always engaged and idiomatic. Schmidt's tone is rich and rounded, Banse's focused, if occasionally a little intense. Deutsch's playing is a joy throughout, whether skipping along with a mischievous twinkle in the eye or conjuring up misty Romantic soundscapes.

Wolfram Rieger steps in as the second pianist in the *Liebesliederwalzer*, where Christoph Prégardien doesn't quite sound at his most mellifluous but is still an ever-intelligent and musical presence. Marcus Ullmann sings cleanly, with a light, open timbre, while Ingeborg Danz and Iris Vermillion offer rich-voiced mezzo contributions.

What some might find missing is the force of character others have brought to this repertoire: you get that in spades in DG's 1970s recordings of this music, featuring the likes of Edith Mathis, Brigitte Fassbaender, Peter Schreier and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. The engineering could be a little cleaner, too. None of that stops this being an enjoyable release on its own terms, though, and a fine conclusion to a major project. **Hugo Shirley**

Brahms

Die schöne Magelone, Op 33 (versions with and without narration). Vier ernste Gesänge, Op 121
Roderick Williams *bar/narr* **Roger Vignoles** *pf*
Champs Hill Ⓜ ② CHRCD108 (154' • DDD • T/t)



'I am a sucker for late-Romantic song or perhaps for histrionic fairy tales of derring-do and blushing maidens', states baritone Roderick Williams in the introductory notes for his recording of *Die schöne Magelone*. Such an explanation is necessary: this is hardly dress-for-success repertoire for any baritone, whether up-and-coming or fully established. But the passion and commitment behind this recording are palpable at every turn. As much as I loved Christian Gerhaher's recent *Die schöne Magelone* on vocal and interpretative terms and will certainly return to it for its Germanic authority, Williams has put together the kind of Anglo-friendly package that has been missing from the Brahms discography of late.

Die schöne Magelone isn't a song-cycle as much as it's a narrated saga punctuated by songs that comment on the story rather than actually telling it. Understanding the music is dependent on knowing how it fits in the story about a prince who finds his beloved, loses her and finds her again. Thus one need not struggle so much with the dated verse used in the songs because the narration has skilfully set up the song's place in the saga. No, this isn't a crutch or an easy way out, but the way *Die schöne Magelone* was meant to be – and is for German-speaking audiences. Having that context also elucidates some of Brahms's unconventional forms that are ostensibly through-composed but are actually built from discrete fragments, somewhat in the spirit of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*. But for those who don't want to experience the narration on every listening, the second disc has the *Magelone* songs only plus, in contrast to these early Brahms songs, the darker, late-period *Four Serious Songs*.

Of course, the clever packaging would mean little without performances of Williams's calibre. His medium-weight baritone makes every phrase clean, clear and unaffected. The gravity of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's recordings isn't missed since these are youthful songs and don't really benefit from being delivered from the viewpoint of what Brahms would become later on. Combined with the clarity of Roger Vignoles's pianism and Williams's excellent feeling for the German language, the music makes sense particularly in some of the more impulsive flights of inspiration that, in other performances, can sound a bit eccentric. The darker vocal colours aren't always there for the heroic passages, but that's hard to fault considering how emotionally present Williams is for the more lyrical Schumannesque songs. The fact that Williams also reads the narration – with a once-upon-a-time friendliness but never sounding like a bedtime story – means that spoken and sung text feel all of a piece.

Even more distinctive, in its way, is the Williams/Vignoles reading of the *Four Serious Songs*. Obviously they take higher keys than Hans Hotter in his classic EMI recording (Warner, 9/52), who has the gravity of some Old Testament prophet that Williams would be foolish to attempt at this point in his still young vocal life. Williams simply sings them with his own kind of rhetoric and, again, is a clear prism through which the songs emerge. Sound quality is excellent, leaving plenty of air around the voice but never losing immediacy. **David Patrick Stearns**

Die schöne Magelone – selected comparison:
Gerhaher, Huber (3/17) (SONY) 88985 41312-2

Cavalli

Vespero della Beata Vergine Maria. Antifone Mariane e Sonate
Claudio Monteverdi Choir, Crema; La Pifarescha / Bruno Gini
Dynamic Ⓕ CDS7782 (63' • DDD • T/t)



In 1675 Cavalli published a large collection of church music containing three sets of Vespers psalms and canticles, presumably the fruits of his labours at St Mark's in Venice. The first of these was music for a Vespers of the Blessed Virgin, performed here by the Coro Claudio Monteverdi di Crema, the instrumentalists La Pifarescha and conductor Bruno Gini. Presented liturgically, antiphon plainchants lack the unified ensemble one expects from

a small group of trained singers, albeit no doubt things run more smoothly than a clutch of unmusical priests might have sounded in the 17th century. When each Cavalli psalm-setting springs into life after the chants there is a sonorous grandeur and ritualistic theatricality. The large ripieno choir of more than 30 singers sounds woolly at times, and tuning can be a little uneven, but single voices organised into two *cori favoriti* make numerous effective contributions.

The booklet professes that the lifelike sound recording 'has not been manipulated, equalised or dynamically altered in any way', and a few moments like the opening of the *Magnificat* might have benefited from additional takes in order to get everyone in time with each other. Some antiphon substitutes and two instrumental sonatas are taken from Cavalli's *Musiche sacre concernenti messa, e salmi concertati* (1656), and these are without fail the most interesting music on offer: La Pifarescha's fluent cornetts and trombones are especially impressive in a six-part sonata reminiscent of Gabrieli's *canzoni*; uncredited countertenor, tenor and bass soloists sing eloquently in a very fine trio setting of *Regina caeli laetare*. Notwithstanding blemishes, there's an appealing sincerity emanating from Gini's explorations of Cavalli's church music.

David Vickers

Dvořák

The Spectre's Bride, Op 69 B135

Simona Šaturová *sop* **Pavol Breslik** *ten* **Adam Plachetka** *bass-bar* **Vienna Singakademie; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / Cornelius Meister**

Capriccio Ⓕ C5315 (78' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, June 2 & 3, 2016



Dvořák's 1885 cantata for Birmingham has been praised in *Gramophone* for its 'blend of horror and lyrical beauty' (Jan Smaczny, 11/04) and condemned for 'scarcely embody[ing] the romantic shudder' (John Warrack, 7/93). The late Edward Greenfield revelled in the work's freshness, vigour and rhythmic drive but I part with him on dismissing the cantata's text, based on a poem by Karel Jaromír Erben.

That text is bewitching if we allow it to recount a light gothic fairy tale rather than a sincere religious parable. A woman is visited by the ghost of her former lover, who drags her through the night (owls screech, dogs howl, frogs croak) to the edge of his grave, at which point she pleads to the Virgin Mary and is rescued. The music too journeys evocatively with theatrical shifts in lighting wedded to Dvořák's distinctive way with Czech words.

There is radiance aplenty in the central love duet and the composer's device of having the baritone narrate the story to eager repetitions of final stanzas from the chorus (including the pantomime-like 'bang, bang, bang' on the window) would have delighted those oratorio-loving Victorians. In 2017 that device still holds out but Dvořák's use of an elaborate choral fugue on the phrase 'One leap and he cleared the wall' seems one concession to the oratorio tradition too far.

This live recording has the edge on its predecessor from Gerd Albrecht on Orfeo. The sound is more immediate and the soloists are better. The chorus can sound geriatric but has more presence. Simona Šaturová is pure and innocent as the girl but thrills when she throttles up. Pavol Breslik is smooth and eager as her ghostly spouse, Adam Plachetka sage-like as the narrator. A nice little discovery; and Meister's account will do just fine until a recording with a slightly fresher chorus and that bit more orchestral detail and grain comes along. **Andrew Mellor**

Selected comparison:

Albrecht, Hamburg PO (7/93) (ORFE) C259 921A

Dvořak

Stabat mater, Op 58 B71

Eri Nakamura *sop* **Elisabeth Kulman** *contr* **Michael Spyres** *ten* **Jongmin Park** *bass* **Prague Philharmonic Choir; Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek**

Decca Ⓑ ② 483 1510 (83' • DDD • T/t)



New recordings of Dvořák's grief-riven *Stabat mater* (1877) come along quite regularly nowadays. Philippe Herreweghe's refreshingly splendid 2013 disc for his own label, featuring Collegium Vocale Gent and the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, was followed by Mariss Jansons's live recording, taped in Munich, both interpretations notable for their warm, glowing choral contributions and impressive solo quartets.

This new release is Jiří Bělohávek's third commercial recording of the work: the first was with the Czech Philharmonic for Chandos in 1991 (2/92), the second for Supraphon 20 years ago. His relaxed though steadfast approach is immediately apparent in the substantial first movement (marked *Andante con moto*), which weighs in at just under 20 minutes, a much slower tempo than Herreweghe and substantially slower than Dvořák's metronome marking of minim=76. Whereas Jansons and Herreweghe's recordings comfortably fit on a single disc, Bělohávek spills over on to a second.

Although the Prague Philharmonic Choir's contributions are disciplined and impassioned, their Germanic Latin is not matched by sufficient clarity in the hard consonants (especially the letter 'T' in the 'Tui nati vulnerati' movement). The same criticism cannot be levelled at the solo quartet, who are uniformly superb. What a joy it is to hear the 2015 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Song Prize winner, the bass soloist Jongmin Park, making the most of the Brahmsian 'Fac me vere tecum flere'. Even more memorable is soprano Eri Nakamura's radiant duet ('Fac ut portem Christi mortem') with Michael Spyres at his most lyrical. Bělohávek perfectly judges the delicate balance between singers and orchestra.

On balance, although there are many lovely, mellow things on this new recording, Herreweghe – with his slightly more dramatic interpretation – would remain my top choice.

Malcolm Riley

Selected comparisons:

Royal Flemish PO, Herreweghe (7/13) (PHI) LPH009

Bavarian RSO, Jansons (3/16) (BRKL) 900142

Franz

Zwölf Gesänge, Op 1 – No 3, Die Lotosblume; No 5, O säh' ich auf der Haide dort; No 9, Jagdlied; No 10, Schlummerlied; No 1, Vöglein, wohin so schnell?. Ach, wenn ich doch ein Immchen wär, Op 3 No 6. Liebliche Maid, Op 4 No 3. Zwölf Gesänge, Op 5 – No 1, Aus meinen groseen Schmerzen; No 3, Auf dem Meere; No 5, Mädchen mit dem roten Mündchen; No 11, Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen; No 12, Genesung. Sechs Gesänge, Op 6 – No 2, Wie des Mondes Abbild; No 3, Auf dem Meere. Sechs Gesänge, Op 7 – No 5, Frühlingsgedränge; No 6, Ja, du bist elend. Sechs Gesänge, Op 8 – No 3, Durch den Wald im Mondenscheine; No 4, Das ist ein Brausen und Heulen. Allnächtlich im Traume, Op 9 No 4. Sechs Gesänge, Op 10 – No 1, Für Musik; No 4, Der vielschönen Fraue. Am leuchteden Sommermorgen, Op 11, No 2. Waldfahrt, Op 14 No 3. Sechs Gesänge, Op 16 – No 2, Im Sommer; No 3, Der Fichtenbaum; No 6, Um Mitternacht. Lieb' Liebchen!, Op 17 No 3. Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome, Op 18 No 2. Gleich und gleich, Op 22 No 1. Sechs Lieder, Op 25 – No 1, Die Lotosblume; No 3, Ich hab' im Traume geweinet; No 5, Im wunderschönen Monat Mai. Sechs Gesänge, Op 28 – No 1, Ich lieb' eine Blume; No 2, Ein Stündlein wohl vor Tag; No 5,

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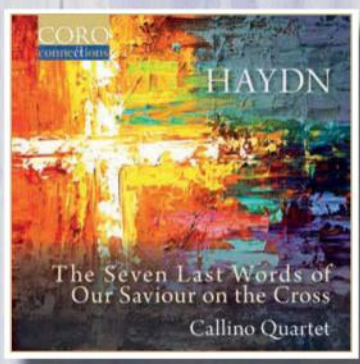
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Robin Tritschler *ten* **Graham Johnson** *pf*

Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68128 (77' • DDD • T/t)



'My Lieder are not meant to awake the passions, but to create peace and tranquillity', wrote Robert Franz (1815-92) of his prolific output of songs. In his heyday the Saxon composer's Lieder – some 280 in total – were ranked alongside Schumann's and Mendelssohn's, though by the end of his life Franz's modest, miniaturist art had fallen from fashion in the new, post-Wagnerian aesthetic. His Lieder have appeared spasmodically on disc over the last decade or so. But it falls to the seasoned Lieder partnership of Hyperion and Graham Johnson – who else? – to produce the first CD entirely devoted to Franz. Given the composer's self-imposed expressive limitations ('chasteness' was his watchword), I wouldn't suggest playing all 47 tracks in a single sitting. But with eloquent advocacy from Johnson – both in his notes and in his aptly scaled playing – and the sweet-toned young Irish tenor Robin Tritschler, Franz's Lieder en masse turn out to be more enjoyable than I'd hitherto suspected.

It is Franz's misfortune that many of the poems he set have been immortalised by other composers, above all Schumann in his Heine *Liederkreis*, Op 24, and *Dichterliebe*. Alongside Schumann's, Franz's songs tend to sound more comfortable, more domesticated. But on their own terms they beguile with their melodic charm and grace, and the discreet aptness of their word-setting. Franz's tender, *innig* 'Am leuchtenden Sonnenmorgen', with its gently plashing accompaniment, is hardly less ravishing than Schumann's. Other highlights include the dulcet lullaby 'Schlummerlied', to a Tieck poem made famous in Brahms's 'Ruhe Süssliebchen'; the poignant moonscape 'Wie des Mondes Abbild', with its harmonic shock to match Heine's final twist; and, in lighter mode, Franz's delightful setting of 'Es treibt mich hin', matching Schumann's Op 24 song in piquancy and surpassing it in humour.

With Johnson's discerning support, Tritschler confirms his credentials as a natural in Lieder. His is a voice of spring, fresh and easy on the ear, produced with a care both for clarity of diction and a true singing line. Tritschler is a lively, sensitive interpreter, too. He catches the drama of the Eichendorff Lorelei ballad 'Romanze' and the passion of the (for Franz) uncommonly acerbic Heine song 'Ja, du bist elend'. But Franz's songs typically demand, and get, dulcet tone, perfect dynamic control, including a limpid *mezza voce*, and refined phrasing, nowhere more alluringly than in the hushed Mörike nocturne 'Um Mitternacht' that, as Johnson points out, palpably influenced Hugo Wolf's setting. **Richard Wigmore**

Grainger

Bold William Taylor. Country Gardens. Died for love. Early one morning. Hard hearted Barb'ra (H)Ellen. Irish Tune from County Derry. Knight and Shepherd's Daughter. Lord Maxwell's Goodnight. My Robin is to the greenwood gone. One more day, my John. The Power of Love. The pretty maid milkin' her cow. Six dukes went afishin'. The Sprig of Thyme. The Sussex Mummers' Christmas Carol. The Twa Corbies. Walking Tune. Willow willow

Claire Booth *sop* **Christopher Glynn** *pf*

Avie Ⓕ AV2372 (58' • DDD • T)



Folk music collections such as this are not nearly as simple to bring off as they might seem. Percy Grainger's folk song arrangements don't have the profile of Bartók's and Britten's; Grainger gains credibility for working from his own field recordings but perhaps loses a bit because his treatments can be highly interventionist. One of my favourites in this collection is 'Died for love', with a typically wistful British vocal line about a fairly extreme death wish accompanied by a rippling ostinato that suggests a larger world that passes by the song's agonising protagonist unnoticed. More frankly descriptive touches such as the dissonant tolling bells in 'Hard hearted Barb'ra (H)Ellen' may be compelling on their own terms but sit less well in ethnomusicology circles.

The 18 selections mix solo piano and vocal/piano folk song settings, including 'Bold William Taylor', 'The pretty maid milkin' her cow', 'The Sprig of Thyme' and more academic titles such as 'Irish Tune from County Derry', which is in fact 'Danny Boy' or 'Londonderry Air'. Pianist Christopher Glynn has written notes in which thoughtful, admiring insights abound but which sometimes interpret Grainger's compositional reimagining in operatic terms that perhaps oversell the pieces, at least in his performances.

Glynn gives Grainger the Urtext treatment at the keyboard, regarding the music with a soft-spoken reverence that has the opposite of the intended effect: the music can seem inconsequential. Grainger's own high-spirited recorded performances or the hearty approach to choral works taken by John Eliot Gardiner on his 'Danny Boy' album (Philips, 4/96) are not the only ways to go with this music. But they're preferable to Glynn's deliberate tempos, sentimental ritards at the final cadences and unusually long pauses between songs that leave you thinking, 'Can we please get on with it?'

Claire Booth's girlish soprano might seem appropriate for folk song, though her fast, quick vibrato obscures her diction, sometimes for entire stanzas, which is a particular problem with the more regional dialects that make sense when articulated clearly but are less comprehensible when read in the accompanying booklet. The engineering is the final culprit – distant microphone placement adds to the overall effect of remote, impersonal performances of music that has the power to enter your bloodstream. No clear-cut alternative is available since Grainger tends to be programmed – sensibly – in mixed-composer anthologies, such as Felicity Lott's adorable 'Favourite English Songs' (Chandos, 7/90). **David Patrick Stearns**

Monteverdi

'Eternal Monteverdi'

Grandi Ave maris stella **Neri** Sonatas – III; VIII **Monteverdi** Vespro della Beata Vergine (1650) **Rigatti** Ardet cor meum. Audi dulcis amica mea

La Capella Ducale; Musica Fiata / Roland Wilson

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ 88985 37513-2 (82' • DDD • T/t)



It is not a new idea to place Monteverdi's church music from sources later than the famous 1610 collection into the context of a hypothetical Vespers sequence. Leonhardt (Philips, 4/89), Alessandrini (Naïve, A/14), Cavina (Glossa, 5/09) and, just issued, Hollingworth (Decca) all present constructions of 'other' Vespers drawing extensively from the composer's last major publication, *Selva morale e spirituale* (1641). The ever-intrepid Roland

Wilson instead chooses five psalms and a litany from the posthumous *Messa a 4 voci et salmi* (printed by Alessandro Vicenti in Venice, 1650) alongside solo motets and sonatas by three other musicians who all worked under Monteverdi's direction at St Mark's Basilica.

La Capella Ducale move through each shift of gears with expert ease, whether singing subtly nuanced 'choral' *tutti* passages (such as the suspension-laden concluding 'Amen' of 'Dixit Dominus') or intimate solo 'concertos'. In the latter category, Monika Mauch's lightly articulated florid embellishments in Monteverdi's 'O quam tu pulchra es' (printed in *Ghirlanda sacra*, 1625) are accompanied discreetly by chittarone and harp, Georg Poplutz's high tenor register has sensitive mellowness in Giovanni Rigatti's 'Audi dulcis amica mea' (a lovely monody over a descending continuo tetrachord), Dominik Wörner's wide compass and intelligent *trillos* are spot-on in Rigatti's 'Ardet cor meum' and Constanze Backes converses gracefully with two violins in Alessandro Grandi's 'Ave maris stella'. Various duo combinations sing with airy suppleness over a four-note ostinato bass in Monteverdi's 'Laetatus sum', and a trio of two tenors and a bass produce beguiling chromatic supplications in one of his rediscovered settings of 'Salve regina' (published posthumously by Vicenti in about 1662). The expert instrumentalists Musica Fiata play at high pitch (A=467), which yields a sunny brilliance in the upper range of sonorities; meantone tuning causes some ear-catching moments whenever solo violin, cornetto and organ continuo are accorded the spotlight in two sonatas by Massimiliano Neri (published 1651).

David Vickers

Monteverdi

'Night – Stories of Lovers and Warriors' Orfeo – Sinfonia. Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria – Sinfonia. Madrigals: Book 2 – Ecco mormorar l'onde; Book 3 – Lamento: Vivrò fra i miei tormenti e le mie cure; Book 6 – A Dio, florida bella; Book 7 – Sinfonia; Al lume delle stelle; Book 8 – Sinfonia; Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda; Hor che'l ciel e la terra; Lamento della ninfa. Scherzi musicale – Quando l'alba in oriente

Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini

Naïve Ⓕ OP30566 (68' • DDD • T/t)



As anniversaries go, 450 isn't much of a round number, but since it will be another quarter-century until the next Monteverdi year, we'll settle for it. Concerto Italiano are marking this one with extensive touring and this new CD, consisting primarily of madrigals they've recorded before, albeit before the 'great schism' that led to a substantial overhaul of their line-up around the turn of the millennium. The programme's theme is night, its terrors and delights, and the conjunction of love and war at the heart of the eighth book.

We have Alessandrini's long experience to thank for a programme of guile and sophistication. With instrumental sinfonias serving as *intermedios*, a striking *Combattimento* is framed by 'Hor che'l ciel e la terra' and Tancredo's 'Lamento' from Book 3, which picks up the thread after Clorinda's last breath but was composed more than 30 years earlier. The *Lamento della ninfa* is a logical continuation, while 'Al lume delle stelle' sees a male protagonist bemoan an enforced separation, both genders doing so in a gorgeous 'A Dio, florida bella'. The alternation of monodic and polyphonic pieces, of *a cappella* and mixed scorings, is pleasingly varied. A dark palette pervades all, not gloomy but suggestive of the altered, heightened senses that night brings forth: even the genial 'Ecco mormorar l'onde' has more shade than light.

The tone of Alessandrini's male soloists (most prominently in the *Combattimento*) is perhaps not classically beautiful but they have guts and a hint of menace. Anna Sinboli's Clorinda captures the character's vulnerability, though Elisa Franzetti just possibly bests her as she breathes her last. Most intriguingly, Alessandrini's reading of the work 20 years on is strikingly different: less dramatic, more analytical, in keeping with the programme – added to which the instruments and the recorded sound are far brighter. Some may find this analytical approach at odds with the popular view of Monteverdi but this misses the fact that it took a formidable musical intellect to harness music to the service of flesh and blood. This recording is in a direct line with Alessandrini's superb account of Book 6 for Naïve, and is in many ways just as impressive. It's also a reminder that he has yet to record three of Monteverdi's madrigal books (not least the magnificent seventh). Might this anniversary year see him complete the cycle? **Fabrice Fitch**

Eighth Book of Madrigals – selected comparison: Conc Italiano, Alessandrini (11/97R, 12/98R, 12/06) (NAIV) OP30435

A Scarlatti

Passio Secundum Johannem

Giuseppina Bridelli *mez* Evangelist **Salvo Vitale** *bass* Christus **Namur Chamber Choir; Millenium Orchestra / Leonardo García Alarcón**

Ricercar Ⓕ RIC378 (58' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Provinciaal Museum Begijnhofkerk Sint-Truiden, Belgium, March 27, 2016



Scholars used to think that Scarlatti's *St John Passion* was a very early work influenced by two similar settings by his uncle Vincenzo Amato (*maestro di cappella* of Palermo's cathedral from 1665). Nowadays it is reckoned that a manuscript in the Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella might be Scarlatti's autograph dating from around 1685 – placing it firmly into the context of Naples, where he had recently become *maestro di cappella* of the viceroy's Royal Chapel, and contemporary to a similar *St John Passion* by the chapel's organist Gaetano Veneziano (which has been recorded by Antonio Florio – Glossa, 7/16).

Leonardo García Alarcón positions every movement of the *St John Passion* between meditative choral responses attributed to Scarlatti in a manuscript dated 1705 in Bologna's Accademia Filarmonica (and which also have stylistic common ground with Holy Week lessons by Veneziano). The resulting hybrid is an unhistorical Passiontide *pasticcio* but the warmly expressive results make convincing textual sense.

Alarcón paces the narrative in the Passion with a firm eye on colourful dramatisation, although sometimes he contrives theatricality where the music might not have been designed to convey it. For example, triple harp continuo is not merely anachronistic but its overabundance is intrusive; regardless of performance practice, some penitential simplicity would not have gone amiss. Giuseppina Bridelli's emotive Evangelist and Salvo Vitale's searing Christus convey poignant characterisations of the Passion text, and the plangent Namur Chamber Choir reveal the polyphonic responses to be the most interesting music on offer. The creation of transitions such as the responses 'Ecce vidimus eum' (inserted after the arrest of Christ), 'Omnes amici mei' (to insinuate weeping after the denial of Peter) and 'O vos omnes' (after Christ's last words) works very well, but creates an illusion that Scarlatti's Passion is more immediately compelling on musical grounds than it would be without them. **David Vickers**



The Namur Chamber Choir and Millenium Orchestra perform Alessandro Scarlatti's St John Passion with 'warmly expressive results'

Schubert

Schwanengesang, D957 – No 1, Liebesbotschaft; No 11, Die Stadt. Am Bach im Frühling, D361. Auf dem Wasser zu Singen, D774 (arr Liszt, S558 No 2). Du bist die Ruh, D776. Erlkönig, D328. Ganymed, D544. Geheimes, D719. Die Götter Griechenlands, D677. Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Der Hirt auf dem Felsen, D865[a]. Im Frühling, D882. Nachtviolen, D752. Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, D877 No 4. Rastlose Liebe, D138. Suleika, D720

Natalie Dessay *sop* [a]**Thomas Savy** *cl*
Philippe Cassard *pf*
Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 41988-2 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Having admired Natalie Dessay in operatic repertoire ranging from Handel to Massenet and Strauss, I'm sorry not to be more enthusiastic about her first recorded foray into Lieder. These days her famously agile, diamond-bright soprano *léger* has lost some of its former freshness and ease, while what David Patrick Stearns, in his review of Dessay's Debussy album (Virgin, 3/12), dubbed her 'Metropolitan Opera vibrato' can widen into a disconcerting beat on sustained notes. Call me precious, but I found the two repeated climaxes of 'Du bist die Ruh' barely tolerable. Nor was I enamoured of her habit of sliding into notes from below, often effective in Italian opera, but here – say, in Mignon's 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt' – compromising the purity and simplicity of Schubert's lines.

As you might suspect, Dessay is at her best in Schubert's lighter, brighter songs: tender and intimate in the Schubertised *bel canto* of 'Am Bach im Frühling' and singing 'Geheimes' with a mingled innocence and pent-up excitement. If you don't insist on a silken legato, she is fine in 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen', sensitive in the hushed sadness of the central section, nimble and smiling in the final *Allegretto*. She is gently touching, too, in the nostalgic 'Im Frühling'. Even here, though, I craved more tonal variety and a more specific engagement with the text. These limitations are more serious in 'Gretchen', which needs more urgency of feeling at the start, and deeper, warmer shadings as it progresses, and 'Erlkönig', which for all Dessay's evident sense of drama remains too monochrome (and the Erlking himself too harmless). As her discs of Debussy and Poulenc (Virgin 10/15) confirmed, few modern singers match her vivid – and seductive – way with French. By comparison her German tends to be too soft-focused, not least in a blurred 'Rastlose Liebe'.

While my pleasure in Dessay's singing was decidedly mixed, Philippe Cassard consistently caught the ear with his discerning 'voicing' and felicities of touch and timing. Indeed, the track I enjoyed most here was Liszt's glittering piano transcription of 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen'. Which can't be quite right.

Richard Wigmore

Schumann

'Einsamkeit'
Sechs Gedichte und Requiem, Op 90 – No 2, Meine Rose; No 3, Kommen und Scheiden; No 4, Die Sennin; No 5, Einsamkeit; No 6, Der schwere Abend; No 7, Requiem. Sechs Gesänge, Op 89 – No 1, Es stürmet am Abendhimmel; No 2, Heimliches Werschwinden; No 3, Herbstlied; No 4, Abschied vom Walde; No 5, Ins Freie. Myrthen, Op 25 – No 7, Die Lotosblume; No 21, Was will die einsame Träne; No 24, Du bist wie eine Blume. Abendlied, Op 107 No 6. Der Einsiedler, Op 83 No 3. Der Himmel hat eine Träne geweint, Op 37 No 1. Mein schöner Stern!, Op 101 No 4. Nachtlied, Op 96 No 1

Matthias Goerne *bar* **Markus Hinterhäuser** *pf*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMM90 2243 (51' • DDD • T/t)

PHOTOGRAPHY: FRANCE DUBOIS



There's a certain overlap between this new Schumann disc from Matthias Goerne and one he recorded in the early 2000s (Decca, 1/05). Both share five songs each from the composer's Op 90, the same trio from *Myrthen*, as well as 'Nachtlied' and 'Der Einsiedler'.

From these overlaps we might infer that this new album, with an emphasis on later, lesser-known songs, contains several of Goerne's favourites. And for Harmonia Mundi his interpretations continue along the same introspective path as the earlier disc: some performances are slower, some a little swifter. But that sense of thoughtfulness, of a singer immersed in his own poetic world – Schumann doesn't get much more *innig* than this – is, if anything, intensified.

Goerne's baritone now has some wear but it remains beautiful. There's an impressive control of line and a lovely veiled *piano* tone in the upper end of his range; the breaths, deep and long, seem to be drawn from a deep emotional well. As I noted with regard to his recent Brahms disc (9/16), he's most comfortable at lower volumes; and this largely reflective repertoire doesn't call on his *fortissimo* often.

But again, as with his Brahms, his slow tempos never, to me, mean mere placidity. With Goerne there's always a sense of knotted-up psychological energy beneath, an energy that occasionally also breaks through to the surface – in the way he and Markus Hinterhäuser, after an exquisitely weighted first couple of pages of 'Requiem', suddenly step on the gas at the *Nach und nach belebte* (gradually more lively) marking, for example. 'Schwere Abend' is given as an urgent recitative; only in the more extrovert 'Ins Freie' does Goerne seem a little uncomfortable.

Hinterhäuser deserves a special mention, too. He coaxes a tone of supreme pearly beauty from his Steinway and matches Goerne note for note in terms of creating the disc's beguiling atmosphere. Harmonia Mundi's engineering captures the piano sound perfectly. I'm less sure about the amount of reverberation around Goerne's voice. Nevertheless, this is another deeply thoughtful and often moving recital.

Hugo Shirley

Skempton

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner[a].
Only the Sound Remains[b]
[a]**Roderick Williams** *bar* [b]**Christopher Yates** *va*
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group / [b]Martyn Brabbins
NMC Ⓕ NMCS234 (63' • DDD • T)



Time was when Howard Skempton was considered primarily as a master of the miniature, notably those for piano and accordion. His output this century, however, has extended into larger and more diverse realms; the present disc features two works, each lasting over 30 minutes, finely contrasted in themselves while also utterly characteristic of their composer.

The length of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* must inhibit musical treatment, and Skempton had to overcome initial doubts before arriving at this abridged setting (2015) that amply preserves the original's narrative unity. The vocal line is necessarily dominant, given the wealth of imagery to be conveyed, though it helps when Roderick Williams has a clarity of enunciation second to none. The instrumental accompaniment for string quintet, horn and double bass is no less acutely judged; notably in those brief interludes which elide between textual excisions and crystalise the music's emotional essence to haunting effect.

An instrumental work of equal length requires a different kind of continuity, and Skempton has duly provided this in *Only the Sound Remains* (2009). Its title the first line of a poem by Edward Thomas, this is less a concerto for viola than one for chamber orchestra; the 16-piece ensemble is drawn into a continuity whose melodic elaboration results in a vast passacaglia of a cyclical motion the more mesmeric for its understatement. Christopher Yates is naturally attuned to his *concertante* role, while Martyn Brabbins secures audible finesse from BCMG.

Superbly recorded and informatively annotated, this is a valuable addition to Skempton's expanding discography and welcome acknowledgement of his significance in his 70th year.

Richard Whitehouse

Szymanowski

Stabat mater, Op 53[a]. Litany to the Virgin Mary, Op 59[b]. Symphony No 3, 'The Song of the Night', Op 27[c]
[ab]**Aleksandra Kurzak** *sop* [a]**Agnieszka Rehlis** *mez*
[c]**Dmitry Korchak** *ten* [a]**Artur Ruciński** *bar*
Warsaw Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Jacek Kaspszyk
Warner Ⓕ 9029 58645-0 (61' • DDD)



This is an outstanding recording, by an all-Polish team, of three of Szymanowski's most sumptuously beautiful works. The two completed sections of the unfinished *Litany to the Virgin Mary* are the perfect choices to open the disc precisely because of their inconclusive nature – the music of the second hangs suspended in the air as though designed precisely to usher in the *Stabat mater* – though chronologically they date from 1930, five years later. Soprano Alexandra Kurzak is absolutely the right voice for both these works, demanding as they do this kind of combination of power and delicacy. Not that the other soloists are left in the shade: the powerful baritone Artur Ruciński is particularly impressive.

The much earlier Third Symphony, a setting of a Polish translation of Rumi's poem 'Song of the Night', provides an ostensibly secular pendant to these two works of religious inspiration. In fact its ecstatic, mystical aura corresponds precisely to the poet's intimations of cosmic divinity, and as such provides an excellent and appropriate counterweight to the two later works of Catholic inspiration. Tenor soloist Dmitry Korchak pierces through the rich orchestral palette (and, indeed, the sheer volume of much of the work), and is beautifully supported by the excellent Warsaw Philharmonic Choir.

Jacek Kaspszyk directs as though his life depends on it, drawing out every shade and subtlety from what is music of an outstandingly wide range of colour. Warner's recording, made in the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall, captures every detail. Highly recommended. **Ivan Moody**

Vecchi

La Hèle Missa Praeter rerum seriem – Kyrie; Sanctus; Agnus Dei **Lobo** Missa Dum aurora – Agnus Dei **Ruimonte** Missa Ave virgo sanctissima – Agnus Dei **Vecchi** Requiem
Graindelavoix / Björn Schmelzer
Glossa Ⓕ GCDP32113 (67' • DDD • T/t)



While not exactly a revelation (given its audible debt to Ensemble Organum),

Graindelavoix's recent recording of Machaut's Mass was vocally superlative and integrated within a very strong programme. But this latest enterprise brings back to mind everything that's problematic about Björn Schmelzer's enterprise. Orazio Vecchi's Requiem was published in Antwerp in 1612. Schmelzer proposes that the work was performed at the obsequies of Peter Paul Rubens in the same city nearly 30 years later. He doesn't disclose his reasoning sufficiently for proper evaluation, but the rest of the programme consists of isolated Mass movements also published in Antwerp over a 60-year period: it seems that the *raison d'être* of the Rubens connection is a lengthy disquisition on Baroque aesethetics whose pertinence to these specific works one isn't inclined to take on trust, and which do little in any case to illuminate Graindelavoix's performances.

Those performances are themselves not quite the finished article, though there's no denying that the sound in itself is very seductive, especially with the full ensemble. Vecchi's lengthy, double-choir 'Dies irae' ought to be the programme's centrepiece, but a countertenor of unreliable tone quality and more uncertain intonation cuts the grass clean under it (the tuning of the top voices generally is hit-and-miss). Given the solemnity of the occasion for which polyphonic Requiems were intended, one might question how much ornamentation would have been considered appropriate, but the predictability of Graindelavoix's embellishments reduce them to a collection of interpretative tics. My interest picked up for the excerpts of George de La Hèle's *Missa Praeter rerum seriem*, but the concluding *Agnus Dei* by Duarte Lobo marks the return of a tenor voice that I'd (not) missed in the group's most recent recordings (my earlier comparison with Liam Gallagher wasn't meant as a compliment). At least no one could accuse Graindelavoix of leaving you indifferent. **Fabrice Fitch**

Verdi

Messa di Requiem
Erika Grimaldi *sop* **Daniela Barcellona** *mez*
Francesco Meli *ten* **Michele Pertusi** *bass*
London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Gianandrea Noseda
LSO Live Ⓜ LSO0800 (78' • DDD/DSD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Barbican, London, September 18 & 20, 2016



Verdi's Requiem launched the LSO's 2016-17 Barbican season last September in performances that, by all accounts, were high-voltage occasions. Not that hearing a performance retrospectively in the privacy of one's own room is quite the same as hearing it live, especially in an age where live recordings are often hybrid affairs, patched and remixed for wider consumption.

Some of the great performances of the Requiem on record are one hundred per cent live. As such they enjoy their own particular structural and emotional integrity. I think of Toscanini, live in Carnegie Hall in 1951, or a recently unearthed 1962 Salzburg Festival performance conducted by Karajan with Giulietta Simionato and Leontyne Price leading the vocal quartet. But there are other factors at play. Different as those two performances are – the Toscanini high on drama with its own peculiarly Verdian articulacy, the Karajan possessed of what Rob Cowan has described as 'a devotional spirit and chamber-like intimacy quite unlike any other' – each is rooted in a close adherence to the spirit (and often the letter) of Verdi's tempo markings.

Some of the electricity generated by Gianandrea Noseda derives from his playing fast and loose with these markings. In the opening movement, Verdi's carefully calibrated tempo relationships go out of the window as the speed for the 'Te decet hymnus' is more than double that of the performance's over-slow (and virtually inaudible) realisation of the opening bars. By contrast, Noseda's headlong way with the 'Dies irae' is highly persuasive, for all that this is less an *Allegro agitato* at Verdi's steady minim=80, more an *Allegro precipitoso* at minim=90, rather as Ferenc Fricsay's was in an orchestrally incandescent recording from the 1950s (DG, 4/55).

Noseda's performances were reported to be a very live affair. Is the fact that on record the tension tends to come and go due to too relaxed an approach in some of the meditative solos or to a degree of discontinuity in the make-up sessions?

Though the soloists can't boast the Verdian pedigree of Pappano's quartet on his 2009 Rome recording, they give a decent account of themselves nonetheless. Bass Michele Pertusi is exemplary, with a lovely legato quality (and a decent trill). Daniela Barcellona may lack the vocal allure of the best of her rivals but she is a safe pair of hands in a role she first recorded with Claudio Abbado in 2001 (Warner, 1/02). Soprano Erika Grimaldi is at her best when projecting the drama of the text, though she struggles with Noseda's impossibly slow tempo in the 'Requiem aeternam' of the *Libera me*. Elsewhere she and distinguished Rossini tenor Francesco Meli acquit themselves plausibly, helped, one suspects, by a pragmatically assembled mix of takes.

The LSO Chorus are superb throughout, as are the LSO themselves. The strings and brass, especially, respond to Noseda's direction with refinement and panache.
Richard Osborne

Selected comparisons:
Toscanini (12/56[R]) (RCA) 88883 79779-2
Giulini (7/64[R]) (EMI/WARN) 085219-2
Pappano (10/09) (EMI/WARN) 698936-2
Karajan (2/14) (TEST) SBT1491

Walton

Façade
Carole Boyd, Zeb Soanes *spkrs*
ensemble / John Wilson
Orchid Ⓕ ORC100067 (65' • DDD)
Includes 'Frankly Speaking', an interview with Dame Edith Sitwell, broadcast November 25, 1955



Listeners to BBC Radio 4 will already be familiar with Carole Boyd (aka Lynda Snell in *The Archers*) and Zeb Soanes (newsreader and announcer on *Today*, *PM*, *The News Quiz* and the Shipping Forecast), the reciters on this new recording of Walton's evergreen, giddily inventive *Façade*. Their alliance with the customarily attentive John Wilson and his razor-sharp seven-piece ensemble is infectiously enjoyable. Sitwell's modernist verse is delivered with collaborative flair, impeccable enunciation and considerable strength of personality. Characters such as Sir Joshua Jebb in 'En famille' and Mr Wagg in 'Polka' spring to life in irresistible fashion, and what irrepressible relish Boyd and Soanes bring to those word-torrents in 'Hornpipe', 'Tango-Pasodoble' and 'Tarantella', as well as the witty dialogue of 'Mariner Man', 'Country Dance', 'Scottish Rhapsody' and 'Fox-Trot (Old Sir Faulk)'. At the same time they are no less appreciative of the sultry languor of 'A Man from a Far Countree', bittersweet nostalgia of 'By the Lake' and hallucinatory haze of 'Four in the Morning'. Other stand-outs include a gently twirling 'Popular Song', seductive 'Through Gilded Trellises', gleeful 'Valse', deliciously drowsy 'Lullaby for Jumbo' and rollicking 'Sir Beelzebub'.

As a fill-up, we get a 27-minute interview (first broadcast on the BBC Home Service on November 25, 1955) with the inimitable Dame Edith herself. It's a wholly fascinating document – and whatever

you do, of course, don't deprive yourself of experiencing her classic 1954 Decca recording (now on Australian Eloquence) with Peter Pears and Anthony Collins (the terrifying 'Black Mrs Behemoth' is alone worth the price of admission).

Admirably produced – and entirely funded – by the indefatigable Andrew Keener, this entertaining album from Orchid Classics earns a hearty welcome. **Andrew Achenbach**

'Decades'

'A Century of Song, Vol 2 – 1820-1830'
Bellini Malinconia, Ninfa gentile. Ma rendi pur contento. Vanne, o rosa Fortunata **Glinka** Do not tempt me needlessly (Ne iskushay menya bez nuzhdi). The Harp (Moya arfa). Tell me why (Skazhi, zachem) **Loewe** Erlkönig, Op 1 No 3. Herr Oluf, Op 2 No 2 **Mendelssohn** Minnelied am Mai, Op 8 No 1 **Niedermeyer** Le lac **Schubert** Auf der Brücke, D853. Auflösung, D807. Aus Heliopolis I, D753. Ellens Gesang I-III, D837-839. Gondelfahrer, D808. Im Frühling, D882. Die Taubenpost, D957 No 14. Der Winterabend, D938 **Schumann** Sehnsucht, WoO121
Anush Hovhannisyan *sop* **Sarah Connolly** *mez* **John Mark Ainsley** *ten* **Robin Tritschler, Luis Gomes** *tens* **Christopher Maltman** *bar* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*
Vivat Ⓕ VIVAT114 (80' • DDD • T/t)



Launched by Malcolm Martineau with a splendid percussive vigour, the equestrian night ride of 'Auf der Brücke' makes an invigorating entrée to this conspectus of song in the 1820s. Schubert in his ripest mastery rightly has prime billing. But as in Vol 1 of Martineau's decade-by-decade traversal (7/16), the range is wide and unpredictable, embracing seven composers and four languages.
I confess I'd never heard Swiss composer Louis Niedermeyer's once-popular setting of Lamartine's 'Le lac', which begins as a portentous operatic scena and ends as a gently rippling romance. But I'm glad I have now, especially as sung by the fresh-voiced tenor Robin Tritschler. New to me, too, were the Glinka songs, whose mix of Italianate *bel canto* lyricism and Russian melancholy is thrillingly caught by the flame-toned Armenian soprano Anush Hovhannisyan – surely a name to watch.

Elsewhere in this enterprising programme, John Mark Ainsley brings thoughtful, shapely phrasing to the teenage Schumann's rather Schubertian 'Sehnsucht' – his first surviving song – and Mendelssohn's mellifluous 'Minnelied im Mai', folk song refined for the salon. Christopher Maltman, with his histrionic flair and colouristic range, is in his element in the quasi-operatic dialogues of Loewe's chillingly atmospheric 'Erlkönig' (which Wagner, for one, rated above Schubert's) and 'Herr Oluf', another variation on the Danish Erlking legend. The Portuguese tenor Luis Gomes has the right vibrant, Latin timbre for three limpid romances by Bellini, though on this evidence a tenderly softened tone is not in his vocal armoury.

More tonal variety, and a more liquid legato, would have made Ainsley's sensitive performance of Schubert's gently hypnotic 'Der Winterabend' even better. And Maltman struck me as too emphatic, lacking in grace, in the delicious Venetian barcarolle 'Gondelfahrer'. But his incisive, virile baritone and expressive German (matched by few English singers) make for an exhilarating 'Auf der Brücke'; and he eloquently exploits both his hieratic bass resonance and his plaintive tenor register in the solemn Mayrhofer setting 'Aus Heliopolis'. Sarah Connolly's deliriously impassioned singing of the apocalyptic 'Auflösung' is a reminder of her superb Covent Garden Brangäne. In lyric mode, she brings an ideal tenderness of tone and feeling to Ellen's three songs from Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. All the while Malcolm Martineau, recorded with welcome prominence, is the most observant and imaginative of pianist partners, whether as a vivid one-man orchestra in the Loewe ballads or in the exquisitely voiced counterpoints of 'Im Frühling' and 'Der Winterabend'. **Richard Wigmore**

'A New Heaven'

Bainton And I saw a new heaven[a] **Bednall** The Seventh Angel[b] **P Cooke** The World on Fire **Dubra** Stetit angelus **Galvani** Et vidi angelum **Harris** Bring us, O Lord God. Faire is the heaven **Jackson** Ecce venio cito **Leighton** Alleluia, Amen[b] **McDowall** I know that my Redeemer liveth **MacMillan** Alpha and Omega. Bring us, O Lord God **Rutter** Hymn to the Creator of Light **T Young** Seven Trumpets[b]
Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford / Owen Rees with [a]**Rebecca Baker,** [b]**David Bednall** *org*
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD475 (78' • DDD • T/t)



The Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford, sing with tonal warmth, excellent tuning, impressive blend and without the clipped, prissy tendencies that can blight their adult counterparts over at Trinity College, Cambridge. But their very 'human' sound resonates differently in the college chapel (listen via the choir's website) than in the less woody acoustics of Keble College Chapel and St Michael and All Angels, the Oxford churches in which this disc on the theme of Revelation was recorded.

For starters, verbal articulation is disappointingly muddy. It might be unfair to compare the Queen's performance of Harris's *Bring us, O Lord God* to the serene yet explosive recent recording from The Sixteen (Coro, 11/15). But you don't have to be a full-time pro to articulate text, and in The Sixteen's recording you can decipher every single word of it. Still, Rees's choir sing Harris (and Bainton) with style and shape. They are probably at their best in *Faire is the heaven*, where cumulative phrasing and control conspire towards a shattering climax.

Beyond those miniature masterpieces, it's the same old story of church music's bizarre stylistic cul-de-sac. Gabriel Jackson, Rihards Dubra and Cecilia McDowell do little more than resort to a toolkit of passé gestures, gestures they appear to refuse to adequately transition to or from. The harmonic language in David Bednall's *The Seventh Angel* is stuck in a textbook neo-Impressionistic ecclesiastical rut. Ditto Philip Cooke's *The World on Fire*. At least Toby Young's *Seven Trumpets* has some teeth, with a genuine response to text and a harmonic imagination that looks beyond faux blue notes. James MacMillan's style might be well established but it feels astonishingly fresh next to much of the 'contemporary' music here, which is woefully short on revelations. **Andrew Mellor**

'Rímur'

Chants, hymns, folk songs and improvisations based on Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish sources
Trio Mediaeval with **Arve Henriksen** *tpt*
ECM New Series Ⓕ 481 4742 (51' • DDD • T/t)



We will never know, write Trio Mediaeval in the booklet, what the innumerable ancient songs and tunes of the first Icelandic settlers sounded like. If we could somehow conjure up those sounds from the late 800s they'd be fascinating indeed but also probably rather morose and perhaps even a touch dull over time (if you're a fan of, say, harmony). Here, the trio is joined by trumpeter Arve Henriksen for an *echt*-ECM concept in which they 'let the



Trio Mediaeval and trumpeter Arve Henriksen explore the ancient songs and tunes of the first Icelandic settlers

timeless tales inspire us to create something new'.

But their imaginative flight is based on considerable experience and expertise with the material itself – material that includes monophonic chants from Scandinavia (hymns to St Sunniva and St Birgitta), the two-voice hymn of St Magnus of Orkney (which once fell under a Norwegian diocese) and some traditional lullabies and stern love songs. Most made their way to Iceland; the title 'Rímur' refers to the chanted narrative poems that form part of the country's early oral tradition.

The trio sing with their usual combination of precision, imagination and deep care with text and ornamentation. Arve Henriksen's trumpet sounds like a flute, a seabird, a human voice, a distant wind and just occasionally like the breathy trumpet of Scandinavian jazz cliché.

Anna Maria Friman's resonant, zingy Hardanger fiddle has particular allure. Some of the songs themselves, as in the simple Swedish shanty 'Du är den första' ('Your hand is the first I have ever held'), move deeply with their simplicity. If the idea of a semi-distant Nordic cousin to Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble's 'Officium' series appeals, this is worth procuring. **Andrew Mellor**

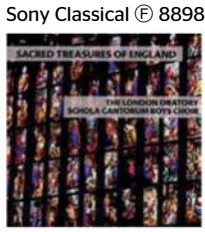
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'Sacred Treasures of England'

Byrd Ave verum corpus. Civitas sancti tui. Haec dies **Parsons** Ave Maria **Philips** Ave verum corpus. Ascendit Deus **Sheppard** Haec dies **Tallis** O nata lux. Salvator mundi **Tye** Missa Euge bone

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum Boys Choir / Charles Cole

Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 41636-2 (58' • DDD • T/t)



The London Oratory Schola Cantorum Boys Choir sing weekly in the generous acoustic of the Brompton Oratory and the music on this disc reflects their dedication to Tudor repertoire. The top line largely dictates their overall sound and in Tye's *Missa Euge bone* the trebles exhibit a bright, joyful grain with a slight tendency to sharpness that portrays lofty phrases as immediate and readily communicative. Coupled with the men's rich voices, they find great interest in the alternating upper- and lower-voiced textures that this Mass favours. In the *Gloria* there is a fabulous transition from calm, homophonic texture in 'Jesu Christe' to effusive, puppyish joy in 'Cum Sancto Spiritu…Amen'. The disarming freshness of this performance is marred only by occasional mannered pronunciation: 'Sanctus' rhymes with 'horse'.

In Byrd's *Civitas sancti tui* the strident trebles recall the choir of New College, Oxford, directed by Edward Higginbottom in 1983 (CRD, 4/84, 12/91). Indeed, the Oratory Schola show similar understanding of the throbbing ache that Byrd writes into his arch-shaped phrases for 'Jerusalem' and trebles lean deeply into 'desolata est' as they are emotionally anchored by the solidity of the men's voices.

Although beautifully recorded in All Hallows, Gospel Oak, it is a pity not to hear the choir in their usual, larger acoustic space of the Brompton Oratory, which smooths and calms their wilder moments. A significant part of this disc's charm, however, stems from moment-to-moment imperfections, which, far from distracting the listener, impart tenderness and a genuine communication often lost in heavily edited recordings. These qualities come from a choir that sings Tudor music as part of a regular liturgical offering and as such it captures much of what is so special about English choral foundations. **Edward Breen**

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by jazzwise

Eliane Elias

Dance Of Time

Concord Jazz Ⓕ CJA00027



Following on from 'Made in Brazil' (2015), for which she deservedly won a Grammy, the pianist, composer and arranger Eliane Elias continues her rich vein of form with 'Dance Of Time'. A celebration of samba's centennial anniversary – recorded, like its predecessor, in Brazil – from the complete reinvention of opener 'O Pato' (a song made famous by João Gilberto in 1960), this is an album that exudes joyousness from every pore. On a stunning version of 'Coisa Feita', Elias, who delivers one of the album's most blistering solos, is joined by its composer, the singer-songwriter João Bosco, an early formative influence. Toquinho, another singer-songwriter, joins Elias on a brace of tracks, the gorgeous 'Samba de Orly' and the album's closer, 'Not To Cry (Pra Não Chorar)', which is marked by Elias' expansive, rhapsodic intro. Take 6 vocalist Mark Kibble again joins Elias, supplying sublime multi-tracked vocal harmonies on 'Copacabana', a song which subtly transforms from R&B to samba, and a super-sensuous reworking of the Weill/Nash classic, 'Speak Low'. **Peter Quinn**

Ollie Howell

Self-Identity

Ropeadope Ⓕ



Ollie Howell swung through karmic extremes in 2009, distracted from the growing pain in his head by the patronage of Quincy Jones and Jimmy Cobb, till finally diagnosed with a potentially paralysing brain malformation. The young Oxfordshire pianist-turned-drummer began composing in the hospital ward, leading to 2013 debut 'Sutures and Stitches'. His debut's positive post-op transcendence continues with this optimistic work. Easy-going melody and sunlit climbing characterise the compositions, as when 'Rise and Fall's lugubrious sax is overtaken by the band's quick clamber to some rocky summit, where they subside, satisfied. There is some gentle piano melancholy, more sweet than bitter, and exultant brass solos, but a lack of variety in arrangements over 68 minutes. Song-titles – 'The Unknown', 'In Truth', 'Coming Home' – move towards wisdom and resolution, but fall short of such profundity in practice. There is, though, genuinely felt emotion throughout, warm comfort almost like an anaesthetic after previous pain. **Nick Hasted**

World Music

Brought to you by SONGLINES

Lisa Knapp

Till April is Dead: A Garland of May

Ear to the Ground Ⓕ ETTGM003CD



In these garlands for May, Lisa Knapp sounds ardent and pure, driven by purpose and conviction. You can tell these songs are for real, not make-believe. Her voice, and the discrete musical settings featuring her partner and producer Gerry Diver, drummer Pete Flood and Knapp herself on strings, organ, keyboards and hammered dulcimer, is layered in the fabric of birdsong, clock chimes, bells and Victorian-era barrel organs. These are mechanical devices from a time when the May rites were still widely celebrated, and the folk tradition itself was being documented. Blur's Graham Coxon plays and sings harmony vocals on 'Searching for Lambs', while Current 93's David Tibet lives it up on 'Staines Morris', originally published in 1653 as 'The Maypole Song', and Mary Hampton guests in the 'Bedfordshire May Day Carol'. The clock chimes and pastoral whimsy is reminiscent of Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd weaving their exultant charms. Knapp's voice is the voice of spring perceiving itself anew, and the music is the sound of a magical, not mechanical, universe. **Tim Cumming**

She'Koyokh

First Dance on Second Avenue

Riverboat Records Ⓕ TUG1101



She'Koyokh, the London band who take their name from a Yiddish greeting, are a brilliant live ensemble who effortlessly blend musical flavours from Turkey to Poland while never sounding forced. Album opener 'Second Avenue Square Dance' hooks listeners with Susi Evans' seductive clarinet intro and throughout the album there are passages of fierce, inspired playing: Matt Bacon squeezes out sparks on guitar then conjures beautifully eerie sounds on kaval (a long thin flute), Meg Hamilton's violin shrieks, weeps and riffs hard, Christina Borgenstierna skilfully works an array of percussion and vocalists Çiğdem Aslan and Živorad Nikolić excel both on solo numbers and in witty duets. Nikolić also plays a tasty accordion. The music performed ranges from New York-style klezmer, Turkish Ladino styles and Albanian kaba (solo violin with drone) to imaginative interpretations of songs from the repertoires of Bulgaria's Ivo Papasov and Serbia's Šaban Bajramović. 'First Dance on Second Avenue' is a musical feast: tuck in. **Garth Cartwright**

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REISSUES

Bryce Morrison on the complete Maurizio Pollini set from DG and **Rob Cowan** on the Takács's complete Beethoven

A lifetime's legacy

The great Italian pianist is given the 'complete works' treatment by DG

No great pianist has prompted more controversy than Maurizio Pollini; a classic invitation to point-counter-point. For his legions of admirers he can do no wrong, while for others his imperious mastery creates not only its own musical ambience but also its limitation. For Pollini, compromise, approximation and self-aggrandisement are alien to his unswerving pursuit of musical truth. Never an artist anxious to move and be moved he is in this sense an 'aristocrat' (my late colleague Joan Chissell) and a 'moral' pianist (the French pianist Bernard d'Ascoli).

Who else has played the Chopin Polonaises with a less wilting, more arresting authority?

Behind the understandable awe prompted by a pianist who, even at the age of 14, could toss aside the difficulties of Chopin's Op 10 Etudes as an irrelevance, lies an undertow of reservation. 'Technically, he plays better than any of us on the jury' exclaimed Arthur Rubinstein after Pollini's first prize in Warsaw. The qualification is perhaps significant. To what extent did the wonder reach beyond such assurance, sheen and mastery? Later there were some who found his Chopin 'faceless, four-square and pedestrian' while others referred to playing that is 'blank and uninvolved, too literal and lacking the rise and fall of phrase'. More certainty than suggestion, such comments tell us that Pollini's burning clarity is achieved at a price, at a lack of freedom, spontaneity and, ultimately, humanity. Throughout his career he has remained scrupulously true to his own lights, with a greater range than such comments imply. (He himself maintains a generous-hearted admiration for many radically different colleagues: for Rubinstein, Argerich and Kempff, who he speaks of as a 'Goethian' pianist, one with an infinite capacity for poetry.) Yet the contradiction comes again, though one common to many great public pianists. Gentle, and indeed lovable in conversation on DG's DVD of Bruno Monsaingeon's documentary, in performance he can fix you with a steely gaze that brooks no argument.

This superb 55-CD and three-DVD tribute from DG (selling for about £180) traces a journey through early aplomb to greater maturity and finally, and sadly, to a frequent deadening of impulse, as if long years of public exposure for an essentially private man have taken their toll. It is as if no longer the possessor of exceptional physical command (for mischievous Sviatoslav Richter he had 'good biceps') there is too little left in reserve.

But let me start by celebrating greatness. No more precise or fiercely articulate performance of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* Movements exists, with every thorny challenge surmounted with an ease bordering on nonchalance. And then there's his newly released performance of Prokofiev's Third Concerto – the most glittering of all – understandably greeted by his Japanese audience in 1974 with near hysterical applause. The same composer's Seventh Piano Sonata proceeds on its lightning course, though with ample room for reflection when required. And if the closing 7/8 Toccata (as remorseless as a tribal drum beat) is taken at a manic pace, it is no less faultlessly controlled. You sense the bridge there, too, to Pollini's incomparable skill in the music of Boulez, Stockhausen and Nono. He alone among great pianists offers this repertoire to an often unwilling public, seeing it as a well-spring of modern life, a vital continuation from one thing to another. Anyone who has witnessed Pollini's live performance of Boulez's Second Sonata, where an infinite complexity is made lucid, will possess an indelible memory of supreme mastery.

Then turning to Chopin, who else has played the Polonaises with a less wilting, more arresting authority? For Schumann the Polonaises were like 'canons buried in flowers' and if from Pollini you are more conscious of canons than flowers there is no lack of inwardness, whether in the dark war-like menace of the E flat minor or in the two big Polonaises, Opp 44 and 53, a retreat from pages of blazing nationalist defiance. Here Pollini makes it entirely understandable why the Nazis forbade the playing of Chopin during their occupation of Warsaw. The two mature piano sonatas, too, are marvels of inclusiveness. The Funeral March from Op 35 may be characteristically more clear-sighted than grief-laden, but there is angelic grace in the central trio and benediction.

In the Liszt Sonata never for a moment do you hear an array of narcissistic gestures beyond the composer's already rich intention. The playing is as moving as it is rigorous, and never more so than in the valedictory close, as poised and profound as it is economical.

Not surprisingly Pollini excels in the prophetic, attenuated world of late Liszt. A chill hangs across *Unstern* making the hymnal piety at the end too late to create consolation. *R.W.-Venezia*,



Maurizio Pollini's entire recorded catalogue for DG has been gathered onto 58 discs

too, captures all of Liszt's sense of an ending as he watched Wagner's funeral as it processed down the Grand Canal – 'Him today, me tomorrow'.

In Schumann it is intriguing that Pollini has chosen to record the wild and outwardly inchoate romanticism of the First and Third Sonatas rather than the more compact Second. His finest Schumann, though, comes in the *Fantasie*. You may miss something of Arrau's rhetorical grandeur, Kempff's life-enhancing chiaroscuro or Argerich's flashes of summer lightning, yet Pollini is as faithful to the dreaming Eusebius as he is to the extrovert Florestan (Schumann's most dearly cherished fictions).

And now, what of Pollini's Beethoven and Schubert? In early, middle and late Beethoven there is a bewildering mix. Why so headlong, why such a race against the clock, even when you consider the finale's *presto* marking? The brilliant propulsion is one thing, but there is too little time for breath or nuance. Again, in Op 81*a* (*Les adieux*) you could imagine a more personal response, a greater sense of the sonata's programmatic nature, yet clarity and poise are undeniable. Pollini's way with the final five great sonatas, a *Gramophone* Award-winner back in 1977, again presents a conundrum, but never in the Himalayan peak of the *Hammerklavier*. Here every muscle and sinew is pressed into life and the sheer physicality of the playing in the outer movements is daunting. Musicianly to the core in the massive *Adagio*, there is a no-less-marked refusal to impede clarity of thought and focus; all this before a lava-like flow of energy in the final fugue.

In Schubert's final Sonata in B flat (for me, the *Hamlet* of sonatas with its ambiguity, its constant shifting of mood beneath its surface), there is all of Pollini's unfaltering integrity in the second movement's 'song of death' (Uchida), with no need for subnormal tempos (Richter) in the opening *Allegretto*. Again, you hear the music unimpeded, never through a glass darkly.

Pollini deserves a book rather than an article to do him justice and I have to confess that there are times in DG's box that have left me conflicted: awed by such magnificence but also moved only to be coldly rebuffed (I am less than fully persuaded by Pollini's Mozart). There is too little space to discuss his Brahms, Bartók (his pace in the finale of the First Concerto makes your head spin) or Debussy (the Etudes and the Préludes Book 1 which include a flawless realization of the direction *profondement calme (dans une brume doucement sonore)* in 'La cathédrale engloutie'). You can never 'typecast' Pollini or arrange for him to be covered by a single view. Place a circle round him and he jumps out of the circle. Few musicians have shown a more single-minded integrity. Exploring his art once more in this wealth of recordings opens up new perspectives whether in the well-tried and familiar, in his take on jealously guarded assumptions and traditions, or in his throwing down of the gauntlet in more forbidding territory. Again, you may feel that there are times when Pollini makes the subjective objective but his prodigious command is undeniable. He remains an extraordinary and unique figure. **Bryce Morrison**

THE RECORDING

Maurizio Pollini: The Complete Recordings on DG

DG (55 discs + 3 DVD) 479 6315

PHOTOGRAPHY: COSIMO FILIPPINI/DG

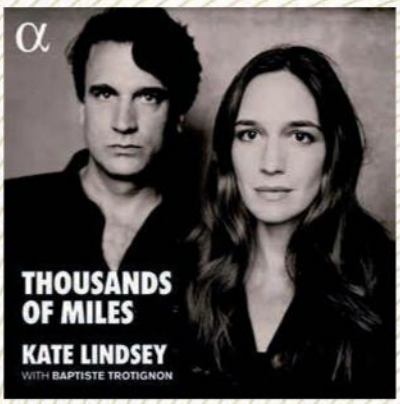


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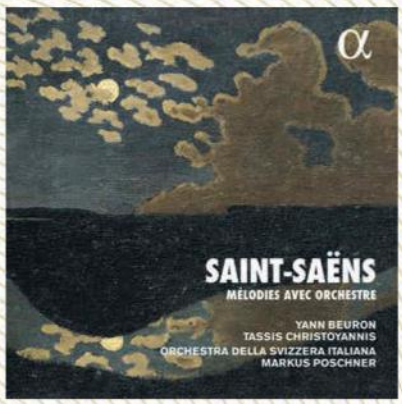
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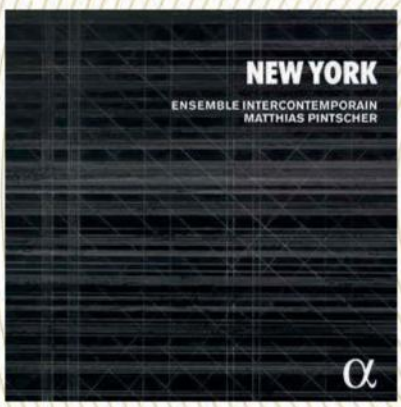
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Yann Beuron TENOR & Tassis Christoyannis BARYTON | Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Markus Poschner

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Le Poème Harmonique, Vincent Dumestre

ALPHA 674 Haydn 2032 - Haydn, Symphonies Nos 12, 70 & 60 *Il distratto* & Cimarosa, *Il maestro di cappella*
Il Giardino Armonico, Giovanni Antonini



Takács Quartet in Bristol, with engineer Simon Eadon and producer Andrew Keener

Back in July 2002 and May 2005 respectively I had the good fortune to review the 'Middle' and 'Late' quartets in this series for *Gramophone* and just as in the Christmas 2004 issue my colleague Nalen Anthoni offered no reason to revise his favourable opinion of the Takács's Op 18 set, I too revisit these remarkably consistent performances with much appreciation. Regarding the 'Late' quartets, I noted at the time that 'attenuated inflections are honoured virtually to the letter, textures carefully differentiated, musical pauses intuitively well timed and inner-voices nearly always transparent […] the Takács are conscientious without sounding overly reverential'. As to the 'Middle' quartets, in the case of the opening of Op 59 No 2, I was especially impressed by how the Takács make silent music of the pauses while, in the exposition, the viola's presence is more strongly felt than usual. Also I thought the demonic finale of Op 59 No 3 rivalled the Emersons in its intensity. No change there then, either.

Of course the intervening years have seen other gifted quartets make their respective claims on our attention in this repertoire, with Beethoven cycles, or cycles in the making, most notably from the Belcea, Elias, Cremona and Leipzig Quartets, not to mention enticing reissues of the (mono) early Végh set and, especially significant, those works that the Busch Quartet recorded so incomparably for EMI/Warner and CBS/Sony. Regarding the Takács venture, which was largely self-financed, the first point worth making is that the sound that producer Andrew Keener and balance engineer Simon Eadon achieved at St George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol between 2001 and 2004 has a degree of presence, clarity and audio perspective that has probably never been equalled. Whether listening on good-quality headphones or sympathetic speakers the realism of the sound, its sense of truthful reportage, means that within seconds of listening you're locked into the music and nothing else. And these are in the main wonderful performances.

As to the 'Middle' quartets, I was especially impressed by how the Takács make silent music of the pauses

This time around I was especially impressed by the way the Takács tackles the transition from the quasi-fugal opening *Adagio* to the ensuing *Allegro* of Op 131, as if sunlight were waking you from a profoundly mysterious sleep. They capture the implied post-*Sturm und Drang* of Op 18 as effectively as even the most energetic of their forebears (for example, the Juilliard and Guarneri) though the opening of Op 16, music so redolent of an *opera buffa* vocal duet, might have benefitted from a more relaxed tempo. Here I draw your attention to the absorbing book *Beethoven for a later age: The Journey of a String Quartet* by the Takács's leader Edward Dusinberre (Faber & Faber, reviewed in March 2016) where, as reported on pages 51-2, Dusinberre and Professor Dénes Koromzay, viola-player of the Hungarian Quartet, were listening to an earlier (1993) Takács recording of Op 18 No 1. Koromzay took out a Hungarian Quartet record of the work for comparison (we're not told which one) and recommended their slower tempo. 'A steady tempo,' he said. 'It's hard to play this way when you are young. Borrow our record; just make sure to return it.'

Out of interest I turned to the Hungarians' mono version of No 6 (now reissued, as is their whole, first, cycle on Heritage) and the tempos are virtually identical, the principal difference being that the Takács favour keener accents. In Op 18 No 1, too, the two first movements are virtually identical timings-wise though the Takács take marginally longer over the wonderful second movement. Among the darkest modern proponents of this emotionally probing movement are the Elias Quartet, part of Vol 2 of their cycle recorded at Wigmore Hall three years ago, with a timing of 11'01" and the Belcea Quartet, even slower at 11'19", while the Takács's keep up the pace at 9'03", a difference that tells in practice as well as in principal. Another, older ensemble of the cycle that also favours some broader tempos is the Taneyev Quartet, their nine-CD set being on Boheme Music, very interesting performances, sweetly voiced and often intense, and reasonably well recorded (in stereo). Do try and track them down.

As to this latest package, selling for about £35, we're offered the standard 17 works in a handsome gold and black slipcase together with superb annotations, a single, fine-sounding 'pure audio' Blu-ray disc of all the quartets, and a satisfying DVD programme (filmed in HD at the grand 18th-century venue of Hopetoun House, near Edinburgh) consisting of the Takács Quartet playing Haydn's Quartet *The Bird*, Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet and Beethoven's Op 59 No 1. The same disc includes an interesting bonus film 'Introducing the Takács Quartet'. My only complaint, presentation-wise, is that while the two-disc slipcases are perfectly durable, the one three-disc folder that includes the 'Late' quartets tears rather too easily. Maybe that single package should have featured top-loading rather than side-loading CD access. It's annoying if you want to keep such a beautiful and musically enriching set in pristine condition. Otherwise, it's five stars all the way, especially if you supplement it with Dusinberre's book (now available in paperback for about £11) to add to the experience. That way you'll be set for the musical journey of a lifetime. **Rob Cowan**

THE RECORDING

Beethoven Complete String Quartets **G**
Takács Qt
Decca Ⓢ ⑦ DVD BD 483 131-7

Opera



Andrew Mellor explores John Joubert's Jane Eyre:

'He knows a thing or two about the precarious love triangle that exists between literature, music and a story to be told on stage' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 92



Mark Pullinger listens to Ravel's L'enfant et les sortilèges:

'Sabine Devieilhe is a peachy storybook princess and a stratospheric Nightingale in the second scene.' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 94

Boldemann

Black is White – Said the Emperor

Sven Nilsson *bass* ..... Emperor
Gunilla Slättegård *sop* ..... The Boy
Laila Andersson *sop* ..... The Princess
Tord Slättegård *ten* ..... The Prince
Conny Söderström *ten* ..... The Doctor
Paul Höglund *bar* ..... The Fool
Sven Erik Vikström *ten* ..... The Runner
Sven-Erik Jacobsson *bass* ..... Security Guard
Gunnar Drago *ten* ..... Printer

Royal Court Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Per Åke Andersson

Sterling Ⓕ ② CDO1111/12-2 (91' • AAD)
Recorded live at the Royal Opera, Stockholm, January 1, 1965
Includes synopsis, text and translation



How timely that a recording of Laci Boldemann's first opera, a satire on totalitarianism told through the story of an emperor who insists on purveying 'alternative facts', should be discovered and published now. The tapes were found in Stockholm and capture, in passable sound, the work's first performance at the Royal Swedish Opera on New Year's Day 1965.

Svart är vitt – sa Kejsaren ('Black is White – Said the Emperor') was conceived as an opera for children and families, and has its roots in an abrupt question a young girl once posed to Boldemann's wife Karin: 'If Hitler was so evil, why did people do as he said?' Boldemann himself had first-hand experience of that predicament, as he was forced to fight for the Nazis having moved from London, where he studied with Henry Wood, to Stockholm (he was born in Helsinki but had become a German citizen). Lennart Hellsing's libretto after Karin's scenario tells of a young boy's entrance into the Emperor's mysterious Oriental realm. The boy's wily opportunism and moral optimism lead the Emperor to a spectacular moment of enlightenment, after which everyone lives freely and happily ever after. That's 1960s Sweden for you.

If there's one dramaturgical problem it's the speed with which the Emperor undergoes his idealistic U-turn from totalitarian grump to whimsical hippie. Apart from that, *Svart är vitt* is a more than respectable piece of high-end, family-orientated music theatre. Boldemann's style is akin to that of Stravinsky and Hindemith – spiky, metallic and dramatically pointed until moments of gorgeous breakaway lyricism. The Princess's ode to love is particularly moving, and we are reminded in Laila Andersson's portrayal of a certain, beautifully clear vintage of Swedish soprano tone.

Boldemann's tunes are idiosyncratic and strong. Sometimes the patter he writes for the characters of the Fool and the Runner is a little shallow, but he knows his opera: the bold unison melodies at the bottom of the small orchestra bring to mind Puccini; the 'ensemble of thoughts' technique he uses to close Act 1 has been employed by everyone from Mozart to Jake Heggie. Overall, Boldemann's theatrical instincts are astute and clear. Easy to hear why the piece was a hit. **Andrew Mellor**

Cesti

L'Orontea

Paula Murrihy *sop* ..... Orontea
Sebastian Geyer *bar* ..... Creonte
Juanita Lascarro *sop* ..... Tibrino/Amore
Guy de Mey *ten* ..... Aristea
Xavier Sabata *counterten* ..... Alidoro
Simon Bailey *bass-bar* ..... Gelone
Matthias Rexroth *counterten* ..... Corindo
Louise Alder *sop* ..... Silandra
Kateryna Kasper *sop* ..... Giacinta
Katharina Magiera *contr* ..... Filosofia

Frankfurt Opera and Museum Orchestra; Monteverdi Continuo Ensemble / Ivor Bolton

Oehms Ⓕ ③ OC965 (176' • DDD)
Recorded live, February & March 2015
Includes synopsis, text and translation



Cesti's *L'Orontea*, first performed in 1656, was immensely popular in its time. The easy appeal of its adroit manipulation of comedy, undoubtedly part of its international success, have led many to see it as a precursor of *opera buffa*, the first in a long line leading to Mozart and Rossini. Certainly *L'Orontea* demonstrates Cesti's fertile talent for the comic, above all in his writing for the drunken servant Gelone, the most substantial role in the entire opera, with more arias to his credit than Orontea herself. Simon Bailey's reading of 'Chi non beve' begins with a coarse throaty tone that catches the boozy mood nicely, but the challenging transition to the *basso alla batarda* technique, involving alternation between bass and falsetto registers, is less successful.

Elsewhere Louise Adler settles down, after some striking opening passagework, to a finely wrought and affecting account of Silandro's set-piece 'Addio Corindo', one of the high points of the score. There are also stylish performances from Guy de Mey and the countertenor Xavier Sabata, who makes an impressive debut in the role of the destitute painter Alidoro. Orontea herself, the fictitious Egyptian queen whose love for the artist provides the central thread in a libretto that revolves around the usual tropes of mistaken identities and the tricks of fate, is affectingly portrayed by Paula Murrihy, notably in the rapidly changing moods of 'Intorno all'idol mio'.

Ivor Bolton directs the combined forces of the Frankfurt Opera and Museum Orchestra with his accustomed flair and keen sense of period style. While the chief beneficiaries of the revival of early Italian Baroque opera have principally been Monteverdi and Cavalli, *L'Orontea* has not been without its champions, beginning with the 1961 Milan revival starring Teresa Berganza in the title-role. René Jacobs subsequently put the work on the turntable with his 1982 three-record set (Harmonia Mundi, 2/83), and this new recording, for which a new edition based on the Cambridge manuscript once owned by Samuel Pepys has been made by the Spanish musicologist Alvaro Torrente, opens fresh vistas.

Perhaps the time has come to explore more of Cesti's 11 known operas. Written



'L'Orontea demonstrates Cesti's fertile talent for the comic': Paula Murrihy in the title-role

as private entertainments rather than works for the public theatres, they often call upon forbidding stage machinery and sumptuous settings, but that should not prevent studio attention being paid to *La Dori* and the theatrically over-sized *Il pomo d'oro*, both of which deserve to be recorded.
Iain Fenlon

Donizetti

Olivo e Pasquale
Bruno Taddia *bar* ..... Olivo
Filippo Morace *bass-bar* ..... Pasquale
Laura Giordano *sop* ..... Isabella
Pietro Adaini *ten* ..... Camillo
Matteo Macchioni *ten* ..... Le Bross
Edoardo Milletti *ten* ..... Columella
Silvia Beltrami *mez* ..... Matilde
Giovanni Romeo *bass-bar* ..... Diego
Donizetti Opera Chorus; Orchestra of the Academy of the Teatro alla Scala / Federico Maria Sardelli
Stage directors **operAlchemica (Ugo Giacomazzi, Luigi Di Gangi)**
Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**
Dynamic Ⓕ ② CDS7758; Ⓕ DVD 37758; Ⓕ Blu-ray 57758 (143' • DDD • 151' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Teatro Sociale, Bergamo, October 28-30, 2016
Synopsis included; text and translation available from **dynamic.it**



Apart from that operatic charmer *L'elisir d'amore*, I've come to the sad conclusion that Donizetti comedies are just not that funny: *Don Pasquale* is a cruel joke carried too far; the one-act *opéra comique Rita* concerns a tyrannical wife; and now we have the first modern performance of his *Olivo e Pasquale*, a *melodramma giocoso* resurrected at last season's Donizetti Festival in the composer's Bergamo hometown.

Lisbon shopkeepers Olivo and Pasquale are brothers, Olivo a brutal father wishing to marry his daughter, Isabella, off to a wealthy merchant, while Pasquale is a shy innocent. With the aid of Uncle Pasquale and a hoax suicide, Isabella eventually persuades Olivo to allow her to marry Camillo, a simple apprentice, instead. For a slight plot, Donizetti manages to spin it out for two long acts. He revised the opera for Naples within months of its Rome premiere, changing the mezzo trouser role of Camillo to a tenor and replacing sung recitative with dialogue in Neapolitan dialect – tedious acres of it.

Directors Ugo Giacomazzi and Luigi Di Gangi of operAlchemica present a colourful production, dominated by scarlet suits and surreal sets of printed fabrics – the brothers appear to be in the newspaper business. It's played as knockabout farce, the singers often forced to mug in pantomime manner. Musically, it has its attractions. The brothers are both stock *buffo* basses and get a fun patter duet. The Act 1 finale is infectious, all the characters dumbfounded at the situation, not unlike Rossini's in *The Barber of Seville*.

The singing at Bergamo's Teatro Sociale isn't terrific though, with only sweet-toned soprano Laura Giordano, as Isabella, putting in the sort of performance to stand up to repeated listening on the CD version released simultaneously. Bruno Taddia blusters as the splenetic Olivo, but has an approximate relationship with the notes in some of his patter. Pietro Adaini's nasal tenor makes little of Camillo, though Matteo Macchioni has a brighter ring as the wealthy Le Bross. Federico Maria Sardelli secures lively playing from the Orchestra dell'Accademia Teatro alla Scala. Dynamic's libretto is only available online, which makes

PHOTOGRAPHY: MONIKA RITTERSHAUS

the CD issue even less recommendable. Better to sample the DVD, but even so this is hardly an essential purchase.
Mark Pullinger

Joubert

Jane Eyre
April Fredrick *sop* ..... Jane Eyre
David Stout *bar* ..... Rochester
Gwion Thomas *bar* ..... Brocklehurst
Mark Milhofer *ten* ..... St John Rivers
English Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods
Somm Ⓜ ② SOMMCD263-2 (125' • DDD)
Recorded live at Ruddock Performing Arts Centre, Birmingham, October 25, 2016
Includes synopsis and English text



There's some disagreement as to whether *Jane Eyre* is John Joubert's seventh or eighth opera but, either way, he is an experienced professional when it comes to writing for the lyric stage and his latest opera only reaffirms the fact. Joubert has plenty of theatrical nous and knows a thing or two about the precarious love triangle that exists between a piece of literature, a piece of music and a story to be told on a stage. In *Jane Eyre* he takes what he needs from Brontë in order to form 'an interpretation' of her novel, not a tracking of it.

In this case, the stage was in a concert hall rather than a theatre: the world premiere of *Jane Eyre* in October 2016 was a concert performance from which this live recording is taken. It's frustrating to meet the piece on those terms because, inevitably, there are a good number of residual feelings missing. I have some suspicion too that Joubert's own process of amending and tightening his score – including the removal of some orchestral interludes – might have wrung out some dramatic weight. Sometimes, for all the keening lyricism of Joubert's music, the piece feels a little rapid and light.

Not that the scoring is exactly heavy, with an orchestra numbering 35 (though Joubert does unfathomable amounts with it) and an often sepia-toned weave that brings to mind Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (there are other Britten parallels: *Peter Grimes* for the wedding scene and *Billy Budd* in Rochester's Claggart-like vision of his fate). Joubert is his own man, but for the 'supreme melodist' described by conductor Kenneth Woods there's no single, memorable, singable theme that pins down Jane's journey. Is that a problem in a tonal opera? Discuss.

What Joubert does well is lead you through the narrative; his love for Wagner is there not so much in sound as in his ability to transition, to twist the lens and shift its angle (I'd say his ensembles in this piece have a German sturdiness rather than an Italian liquidity). Kenneth Woods conducts to those strengths and with clear passion. The voices are fine. April Fredrick as Jane sings with delicacy but is ultimately contained and can't muster the colours in the upper half of her register that she can in the lower part. David Stout as Rochester is commanding but could do with opening up a little at the top. Mark Milhofer is best of all, bringing a bright, manic zeal to St John Rivers.

Perhaps the lead couple would be shown in a better light were they not swamped by a recording that bolsters the orchestra. It also does a disservice to Joubert that Somm's entire product can feel like a suspicious act of pleading. Copious references to the 'occasion' make it feel more like a memento for family and friends than the internationally available document that this opera deserves (a slow, dry interview with Christopher Morley as the bonus track doesn't help). So is it, as everyone in the booklet wants to tell us, Joubert's masterpiece? Apparently the composer would be more likely to point to *Under Western Eyes*, his operatic reaction to *Wozzeck* and *Grimes*. **Andrew Mellor**

Lully

Persée (1770 version, arr Dauvergne, Bury & Rebel)
Mathias Vidal *ten* ..... Persée
Hélène Guilmette *sop* ..... Andromède
Marie Lenormand *mez* ..... Cassiope
Katherine Watson *sop* ..... Mèrope
Jean Teitgen *bass* ..... Céphée
Tassis Christoyannis *bar* ..... Phinée
Cyrille Dubois *ten* ..... Mercure
Chantal Santon-Jeffrey *sop* ..... Vénus
Marie Kalinine *mez* ..... Méduse
Thomas Dolié *bar* ..... Sténone
Zachary Wilder *ten* ..... Euryale
Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet
Alpha Ⓕ ② ALPHA967 (108' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, text and translation



The first production of Lully's *Persée* (Paris, 1682) took place the same year that Louis XIV moved into his new chateau at Versailles. Work did not start seriously on a theatre sizeable enough for ballets and operas until nearly a century later, when a redesigned rococo opera house was rushed to completion in just 23 months so that it would be ready in time for celebrating the marriage between the Dauphin (the future Louis XVI) and Marie Antoinette of Austria; its inauguration on May 16, 1770, was a revival of *Persée*, suitable as grand spectacle on account of its elaborate scenes and use of stage machinery. For the festive production Quinault's libretto was abridged drastically and Lully's old-fashioned score was reorchestrated by Antoine Dauvergne (Acts 1 and 4), Bernard de Bury (Act 2) and François Rebel (Act 3); they modernised the instrumentation (sometimes including clarinets, flutes and horns) and added new music. The cast included the high tenor Joseph Legros (Perseus) and Sophie Arnould (Andromeda) – only four years before they sang the title-roles in Gluck's Paris version of *Orphée et Eurydice*.

This fascinating intersection of Lulliste reception and cultural and political history comes alive in Hervé Niquet's vibrant recording made in the Royal Opera at Versailles. Katherine Watson's jealous Mèrope, Tassis Christoyannis's villainous Phinée, Marie Kalinine's bitter Méduse, Hélène Guilmette's anguished Andromède and Mathias Vidal's full-blooded Persée all sing with spirited commitment, although the contributions of most characters are marginalised by the radical 1770 abridgements that evidently favoured spectacular divertissements over the more measured detail and graceful pacing of Lully's original drama. The assembled forces fall some way short of the 1770 production's tally of 95 chorus singers and 80 orchestral players but Le Concert Spirituel's playing and singing are as ripe as anyone accustomed to Niquet's lively musicianship will expect. Dauvergne's reinforced orchestration in the divertissement of Ethiopians competing in archery, wrestling and dancing is played with vigorous boldness, whereas a sleepy divertissement in the Gorgons' den features Rebel junior's woodwind-enriched instrumentation. Dauvergne's new music for the final act's *deus ex machina* for Venus (sung alluringly by Chantal Santon-Jeffrey) and a florid aria for Persée constitute a 'modern' *licenza* paying homage to the Dauphin and Marie Antoniette that is a world apart from Lully's conclusion.

Alpha's lavishly illustrated hardback book contains everything one could wish for except a transparent concordance of the departures from Lully's original score in each scene of this peculiar version – anyone uninitiated into *Persée* might want to listen to the exemplary recording by Les Talens Lyriques and Christophe Rousset or watch the film of Niquet's own performance with Opera Atelier and Tafelmusik in order to digest intriguing evidence of how the *tragédie*



Le Concert Spirituel and Hervé Niquet give a vibrant account of Lully's Persée

en musique was reinvented a few generations later by musicians shaking off the composer's monopolistic spectre. **David Vickers**

Selected comparisons:
Rousset (5/02) (NAIV) E8874
Niquet (9/05) (EURO) DVD *205 4178*

Puccini

Tosca

Leontyne Price *sop* ..... Tosca
Giuseppe Di Stefano *ten* ..... Cavaradossi
Giuseppe Taddei *bar* ..... Scarpia
Carlo Cava *bass* ..... Angelotti
Fernando Corena *bass* ..... Sacristan
Piero de Palma *ten* ..... Spoletta
Leonardo Monreale *bass* ..... Sciarrone
Alfredo Mariotti *bass* ..... Gaoler
Herbert Weiss *treb* ..... Shepherd Boy
Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan

Decca Ⓜ ③ (2 CDs + BD) 483 1486DHO3
(114' • ADD • 96kHz/24-bit • Dolby TrueHD & LPCM stereo)
Includes synopsis, text and translation
From RCA Victor ② ● SER5507-8 (11/63)



Although it was the first to be recorded, this *Tosca* is the third of Karajan's Puccini sets on Decca to receive the lavish audiophile treatment. Presumably released to coincide with Leontyne Price's 90th birthday, it features a new 24-bit, 96kHz remastering presented on two CDs as well as Blu-ray audio disc – but it's a shame that Decca don't also offer a hi-res download option.

It dates from 1963, and the sound itself has moments of both brittleness and full-flight magnificence. Generally this is a much more variegated affair than Price's robust RCA remake – recently reissued in that label's birthday box-set. Giuseppe Di Stefano, a decade on from singing the role opposite Callas for EMI, is a light-voiced, sunny Cavaradossi. He offers beautiful enunciation but can also sound desiccated, without the necessary ringing timbre or robustness for the character's heroics. Giuseppe Taddei is an at times shockingly forceful, brutish Scarpia. Fernando Corena's Sacristan rather overdoes the *buffo* shtick.

Price's interpretation is not especially vividly drawn, but she is in gorgeous voice, sounding seductive and with plenty of satin sheen high up. But you notice the lack of forcefulness in the middle of the range in particular: this is very much a lyrical account of the role – in terms of both voice and dramatic approach. Karajan's conducting is clearly symphonically conceived, building momentum and emotional power over longer paragraphs, sometimes to the detriment of dramatic detail – some passages seem to be allowed to sag just to give the subsequent build-ups greater impact. However, the sense of lyrical sweep he does gradually build up in, for example, the long Act 1 duet is undeniably impressive.

Listening in detail to this recording in its cleaned-up guise also emphasises the extent to which John Culshaw's production shapes what we hear. A note from him reproduced in the lavish hardback booklet discusses certain sonic effects, none of which is particularly intrusive, even if they seem somewhat inconsistently applied.

What's more troubling are the shifts in perspective, the sonic zooming in and out, often signalled by clunky edits. Some exchanges are almost whispered, others fully sung-out. The microphones pick up plenty of detail in the orchestra (the harp often sounds prominently), but the sound picture never feels natural. The shifting focus, meanwhile, often serves to make the singers' characterisations feel strangely generalised.

There's certainly some great playing, some great singing and great conducting, then, but this reissue underlines the fact that Karajan's Vienna *Tosca* is also something of a curate's egg. **Hugo Shirley**

PHOTOGRAPHY: LE CONCERT SPIRITUEL

Ravel

L'enfant et les sortilèges[a]

Chloé Briot *mez* ..... L'Enfant
Nathalie Stutzmann *contr* ..... Maman/La Libellule/La Tasse Chinoise
Sabine Devieilhe *sop* ..... Le Feu/La Princess/Le Rossignol
Jodie Devos *sop* ..... La Chauve-souris/La Chouette/Une Pastourelle
Julie Pasturaud *mez* ..... La Bergère/La Chatte/L'Écureuil/Un Pâtre
François Piolino *ten* ..... La Théière/Le Petit Vieillard/La Rainette
Jean-François Lapointe *bar* ..... Le Chat/L'Horloge Comtoise
Nicolas Courjal *bass* ..... Le Fauteuil/L'Arbre

Debussy

L'enfant prodigue[a]

Karina Gauvin *sop* ..... Lia
Roberto Alagna *ten* ..... Azaël
Jean-François Lapointe *bar* ..... Siméon
Debussy Symphony – Finale (orch C Matthews)
Radio France Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra / Mikko Franck

Erato Ⓑ ② 9029 58969-2 (89' • DDD)
[a]Recorded live at the Auditorium of Radio France, Paris, April 15, 2016
Includes texts and translations



Not just one but two naughty boys here. Rather than pair Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with *L'heure espagnole*, Warner matches it to another errant (if much older) child, Debussy's *L'enfant prodigue* ('The Prodigal Son'), the cantata with which he won the Prix de Rome in 1884. Both works were recorded in concert in Paris's warm, wonderful Maison de la Radio last April.

There have been plenty of Ravel *L'enfant* recordings of late. I'm not convinced that Mikko Franck is as natural a Ravel conductor as Seiji Ozawa or Leonard Slatkin – the orchestral magic doesn't always flow from the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Slatkin's foxtrot, for example, has plenty of chic, whereas Franck is a bit flat-footed. However, the casting is very strong, with bags of character, from Nathalie Stutzmann's molasses contralto as Maman – and a heavily lacquered Chinese cup – to François Piolino's demented Arithmétique and feisty teapot ('I'll marm'lade you!'). Chloé Briot kicks up a storm as the Child, while Nicolas Courjal and Julie Pasturaud repeat their witty armchair and sofa double act from the Naxos Lyon recording. Best of all is Sabine Devieilhe's terrific coloratura as Fire – faster and yet more incisive than any incendiary competition (a blustery Annick Massis for Slatkin and an overtaxed Anna Christy for Ozawa). Devieilhe is also a peachy storybook princess and a stratospheric Nightingale in the second scene.

From the opening sunrise of *L'enfant prodigue*, it's obvious this isn't typical Debussy. There's a lot of Massenet in the score based on the biblical parable – just listen to the whimsy of the harvest procession. Was the young composer writing what he thought the Prix de Rome judges wanted to hear?

Franck's cast is even more luxurious than for the Ravel. Karina Gauvin, as Lia the mother, reins in her powerful soprano for a moving opening air, while Roberto Alagna's open-hearted, sunny tenor and excellent diction make for the best Azaël now on disc. Jean-François Lapointe's Siméon (the father) doesn't have much to do but is reassuringly sturdy. All three sound far more idiomatic than the Orfeo cast under Gary Bertini. Keener competition though comes from Glossa under Hervé Niquet, where Guylaine Girard's lighter soprano is marginally preferable to Gauvin as Lia. Niquet conducts the score with more joy as well.

The disc concludes with Colin Matthews's charming orchestration of the finale of Debussy's Symphony in B minor, a curiosity composed for piano duet by the 18-year old composer in 1880. **Mark Pullinger**

L'enfant et les sortilèges – selected comparisons:
Saito Kinen Orch, Ozawa (9/15) (DECC) 478 6760DHO
Lyon Nat Orch, Slatkin (12/15) (NAXO) 8 660336
L'enfant prodigue – slected comparisons:
Stuttgart RSO, Bertini (9/83R) (ORFE) C012 821A
Brussels PO, Niquet (GLOS) GCD922206

Verdi

Oberto

Woong-Jo Choi *bass* ..... Oberto
Anna Princeva *sop* ..... Leonora
Adrian Dumitru *bar* ..... Riccardo
Katerina Hebelkova *mez* ..... Cuniza
Daniela Bañasová *mez* ..... Imelda
Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno; Cappella Aquileia / Marcus Bosch

Coviello Ⓕ ② COV91702 (105' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Festspielhaus Congress Centrum, Heidenheim, July 31 – August 5, 2016
Includes synopsis, text and translation



Verdi's second opera has fared surprisingly well on record, especially if you include its appearances on DVD. In the audio-only stakes, though, this newcomer is up against recordings from both Neville Marriner and Lamberto Gardelli: the former (offering also various additional discarded arias) with a cast including Samuel Ramey and Maria Guleghina, the latter with Rolando Panerai, Ghena Demitrova and, as Riccardo, no less a Verdian than Carlo Bergonzi.

It's fair to say that Coviello Classics' set, recorded live at the Heidenheim Opera Festival (there's some stage noise but applause is removed), can't compete with that sort of fire-power. However, it's a very respectable achievement, and one that reflects the quality and broad scope of what goes on all across the German-speaking world, away from the bigger, better-known houses.

The conductor, Marcus Bosch, is music director at the Nuremberg Opera, as well as being artistic director of the Heidenheim Festival and its orchestra, the Cappella Aquileia. He's a fluent Verdian who brings idiomatic spring and punch to the score. His orchestra, a modest-sounding ensemble, play with elegance and verve. However, compared with Marriner and his Academy of St Martin in the Fields, audibly revelling in all the style and pizzazz they picked up through recording so much Rossini, the present set can't help sounding rather flat, not least because the sound is less direct and vivid.

The cast have all the notes, singing with impressive reliability and robust professionalism. The first to appear, Adrian Dumitru, sounds slightly airy and effortful as Riccardo but phrases with a fair amount of Italianate generosity. Woong-Jo Choi is a somewhat woolly and stolid Oberto. Katerina Hebelkova is a bit fuzzy as Cuniza, too, but there's a welcome dramatic grandeur to Anna Princeva's Leonora, full of fire and righteous anger.

Together, though, they offer just the kind of potent, red-blooded drama one wants, and all of them throw themselves fearlessly into the far from modest challenges Verdi presents – Giuseppina Strepponi was among those envisaged for the cast at one stage in the work's tortuous route to its 1839 La Scala premiere. The score itself bursts with melody, verve and rough-diamond genius, plus plenty that looks forward to later masterpieces. This new recording does it justice, certainly, but first-time Obertians might still want to start off with one of the starrier alternatives. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparisons:
Gardelli (5/85R) (ORFE) C105 842H
Marriner (8/97R) (DECC) 478 4169DM2



'Fire and righteous anger': Anna Princeva as a dramatic Leonora in Verdi's Oberto

Wagner

Lohengrin
Klaus Florian Vogt *ten*..... Lohengrin
Camilla Nylund *sop*..... Elsa
Katarina Dalayman *sop*..... Ortrud
Evgeny Nikitin *bar*..... Telramund
Falk Struckmann *bass*..... King Henry
Samuel Youn *bar*..... Herald
Netherlands Radio Choir; Chorus of Dutch Nartional Opera; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder
RCO Live Ⓑ ③ RCO17002 (3h 31' • DDD/DSD)
Recorded live, December 18 & 20, 2015
Includes synopsis, text and translation



Just as the drying-up of studio recordings (never plentiful) of Wagner's 'romantic opera' seemed to threaten the work with ill-earned rare status, a steady trickle of often historic live performances – Frankfurt/de Billy, Vienna/Böhm, Munich/Knappertsbusch – have come swan-like to the rescue.

The latest of these is the present issue, intended to be led by Andris Nelsons as a sequel to his lauded *Holländer* from the same address. It actually found in Mark Elder a chief for whom the word 'substitute' would be an insult. British audiences will recall both a completely realised reading of *Lohengrin* as his first guest return to ENO in the early 1990s and a stream of excellently prepared and articulated large-scale choral works from his Hallé Orchestra. This Wagner shares with the recent *Gerontius* broadcast a rare ability, almost Furtwängler-like, to stand the music still (without losing momentum) for better display in the grandest passages – try especially the choral interventions of Act 2. This conductor manages well the tricky balancing of stately operatic grandeur and musically dramatic momentum in this work.

So the biggest hurrahs go to Elder, the choruses (try the Act 1 women in those beautiful and novel cocktail splashes of colour that fire up Elsa's plea to her silent rescuer) and the orchestra in its own home. Add Nylund's vocally fearless heroine, well portraying Wagner's heightened Weber style and hurling forwards the victory celebrations of Act 1 in a way not all her colleagues dare, Youn's imposing Herald and Struckmann's textually so clear and more baritonal-sounding than usual King, and that's nearly enough. And yet – and I don't know whether this is something to do with the 'semi-staging' that illustrated this supposed concert or the unblinking clarity of the Concertgebouw acoustic – not all the voices as recorded here quite live up to their reputations.

Lohengrin has almost inevitably become a 'Paraderolle' for the angelic yet penetrating tones of Klaus Florian Vogt, here in (no less than) his fourth complete recording of the part. Perhaps comparative listening to the bigger voices of Hans Hopf (for Knappertsbusch) or Jess Thomas (for Böhm) made me dream of more heroic Lohengrins (Melchior!) but for once I wanted more simple 'welly' from our hero when confronting Telramund and Ortrud. And those two – for all their obvious commitment – disappoint. Neither paces the essentially recitative nature of much of their roles well: compare, cruelly, Christa Ludwig and Walter Berry (with Böhm) where the silences really bleed in the great Act 2 duet. Nikitin in his brutality seems often just under the note; Dalayman sounds less focused than normal and is insufficiently terrorising in her final 'Fahr'heim' (compare the shattering live Furtwängler excerpts from 1936).

Despite these reservations, this performance – and its recorded sound – is a valuable and mostly compelling document. **Mike Ashman**

PHOTOGRAPHY: OLIVER VOGEL

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2017|2018

2017

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di **Lucio Gregoretti**

VENERDÌ 3 | DOMENICA 5 NOVEMBRE
TROVATORE
di **Giuseppe Verdi**

VENERDÌ 1 | DOMENICA 3 DICEMBRE
FAUST
di **Charles Gounod**

2018

VENERDÌ 26 | DOMENICA 28 GENNAIO
TRITTICO
di **Giacomo Puccini**

GIOVEDÌ 22 | DOMENICA 25 FEBBRAIO
FANCIULLA DEL WEST
di **Giacomo Puccini**

VENERDÌ 16 | DOMENICA 18 MARZO
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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly creates two listening journeys inspired by our Hall of Fame, past and present

Fiddlers who tug at the heartstrings

Of this year's new entrants into our Hall of Fame, 50 per cent are violinists – and a wonderfully varied and contrasted group they are too. Surely one of the greatest of the great violinists, **Fritz Kreisler** (1875-1962) melts the heart with his immediately recognisable, sweet tone, his wonderfully enveloping way with phrasing and his unique use of portamento. It's a style that's associated with the Viennese way of playing and it certainly has something of the easy elegance of the pre-war Austrian capital. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his own *Liebesleid*. **Nathan Milstein** (1903-92), born in Odessa and a pupil of both Leopold Auer and Eugène Ysaÿe, takes us into another glorious age of violin-playing. Purity of tone and astoundingly accurate intonation, combined with a suppleness that gave his playing an amazing fluidity, were hallmarks of his art: try him, fleet of finger, in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. The Belgian **Arthur Grumiaux** (1921-86) was a player who, once heard, was never forgotten: here is a violinist with every technical and musical resource at his disposal but who always put the music first. In Mozart he is exquisite but he could toss off the most fiendish of fireworks with utter aplomb. Sample his glorious account of César Franck's Violin Sonata with Paul Crossley. Still very much with us, and on terrific form at 70, is the Latvian violinist **Gidon Kremer**. He recorded all the great concertos as a younger man, and nowadays spends more time playing chamber music or working with his splendid Kremerata Baltica. Kremer's vividly spontaneous, almost improvisatory approach to his chosen repertoire – often it really does sound like the music has been freshly composed – sets him apart from many of his colleagues. It captures the very reason we go back, time after time, to hear the same piece played by different musicians: the music speaks to us differently through different players. His 'New Seasons' album is well worth a listen. **Kyung Wha Chung**, a year younger than Kremer, has given us some of the finest modern accounts of the core works of the violinist's repertoire. And she remains a player of style, elegance and emotional power as her recent set of solo Bach wonderfully reveals.



Caballé: glorious in Puccini, but her repertoire ranged from Mozart to Wagner

Kreisler Liebesleid Kreisler RCA
Mendelssohn Violin Concerto Milstein Warner Classics
Franck Violin Sonata Grumiaux Philips
'New Seasons' Kremer DG
Bach Sonatas and Partitas Chung Warner Classics

Five of the loveliest soprano voices

Looking back over the six years of *Gramophone*'s Hall of Fame, five lyric sopranos stand out, one of them joining this august company with the 2017 intake: that wonderful Catalan singer, **Victoria de los Angeles**. Graham Johnson remembers her artistry on page 23, but prompted by a 'Reputations' article written by the late John Steane for our December 1998 issue, I'd commend her in a Spanish song. 'When she sang Montsalvatge's lullaby (*Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito)*,' JBS wrote, 'the hall was quiet with that special hush that betokens an intense awareness of the moment, a shared sense of perfection, a "held" loveliness.' Another singer also born in Barcelona (albeit 10 years later) is **Montserrat Caballé**, a performer who, during her long career, embraced a colossal repertoire from Mozart to Wagner via the Italians, let alone a host of crossover projects ('Barcelona' with Freddie Mercury being a thing of wonder!). An early Puccini album with Mackerras and the LSO finds her at her finest. Try her as Puccini's Magda (*La rondine*). Purer in tone than even Caballé is **Gundula Janowitz**, for many years Karajan's favourite soprano for the Austro-German repertoire. For me, her recording of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* is a classic – as is, for many people, **Elisabeth Schwarzkopf**'s second (studio) recording of the same work with George Szell – and I can certainly surrender to its range of colour and expression. But no, my choice for Schwarzkopf – and of all the great singers she's one who divides opinion perhaps the most dramatically – is Mozart's concert aria *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, with Brendel playing the piano part and George Szell conducting the LSO, in which Schwarzkopf inhabits the words as few others. A soprano who sang a similiar repertoire to Janowitz and Schwarzkopf is **Kiri Te Kanawa**, possessor of one of the loveliest voices of our time. Glorious in Mozart and Strauss, it's to her *Le nozze di Figaro* with Solti that I'd turn for her wonderfully human Countess.

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Montsalvatge Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito Los Angeles Warner Classics
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R Strauss Four Last Songs - Im Abendrot Janowitz DG
Mozart Ch'io mi scordi di te Schwarzkopf Warner Classics
Mozart Le nozze di Figaro - Porgi amor Te Kanawa Decca

PHOTOGRAPHY: REG WILSON/WARNER CLASSICS

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Tchaikovsky memories

Eloquence mine the DG and Decca catalogues and unearth some Tchaikovskian treasures

It's easy to forget that DG's trawl of Tchaikovsky symphony recordings in the 1960s and '70s runs beyond Mravinsky in the last three and Karajan's only complete 'numbered' cycle (with the Berlin Philharmonic). Australian Eloquence has fitted roughly contemporaneous versions of all six symphonies plus *Manfred* and some interesting extras into a sequence of three generously filled double-packs, most (though not all) of the material having previously appeared on CD. Michael Tilson Thomas's 1970 Boston Symphony account of the First (*Winter Daydreams*) Symphony is an undoubted highlight, being both elegant and vivacious, the playing for the most part superb. Claudio Abbado makes a dramatic case for the Second (*Little Russian*) with the New Philharmonia (1968), the timps especially well focused by DG's engineers. Abbado's VPO Fourth (1975) leaves a more forceful impression than his Chicago re-make (Sony Classical), though I still love the American orchestra's refined sound. Following the symphony comes a chipper *Nutcracker* Suite featuring the BPO under Ferdinand Leitner (1959), a fine-tooled performance with a sound surprisingly good for its age.

Moshe Atzmon and the Vienna Symphony in 1973 seem very much in sympathy with the spirit of No 3 (*Polish*) where lyrical lines predominate, understanding the work's balletic ground-springs. Abbado's LSO Fifth (1970) is impassioned without overheating; Leitner and the BPO offer a well-paced *Marche Slave* but perhaps the most charismatic performances on this particular set come from Witold Rowicki and the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra in 1959 recordings of suites from *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*. The latter's 'scene' ('Pas de Deux') features a beautiful albeit un-credited violin solo; the opening's oboe solo is taken very broadly and my only disappointment is that the finale stops short of its thrilling peroration.

Abbado's VPO *Pathétique* (1973) is at its best in the first movement, especially the fleetly drawn development section. Also compelling is his *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture, a 1971 Boston Symphony recording, and Leitner's *Capriccio italien* which conforms to the well-played and highly-ordered pattern already established with his other performances. Yuri Ahronovitch's 1977 account of the *Manfred* Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra, however, is at times unfocused, and in any case hampered by rather hollow sound, though the transposition of the organ loft to Watford Coliseum from Munich's Herkulessaal (the organ part was recorded a month or so later) at least grants the sound a spot of added presence. On the positive side, the bulk of the finale has rarely revealed its Lisztian roots as vividly as here, and much of the quieter music is movingly played.

Eloquence's first CD release of a little known version of Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* reminds me how Decca's engineers, Silvio Varviso and the Suisse Romande Orchestra made a beeline for the score's brass and percussion writing (horns, cymbals and tam-tam especially) and how Varviso's relatively straightforward handling of the score underlines its many strengths. Borodin's Second Symphony is granted equally unfussy reportage, the overall approach pleasingly energetic if hardly the last word in precision. This is Victoria Hall sound at its best and Walter Weller's LPO account of Rachmaninov's brooding tone poem *The Rock* (1974) makes for an attractive bonus.

While Eloquence bolsters Varviso's original LP programme, Pristine effects a swap for an August 1962 Edinburgh Festival programme by the LSO under Igor Markevitch. As released by BBC Legends some years ago (BBCL4053-2), the sequence consisted of Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, and a group of Mussorgsky songs with Galina Vishnevskaya. The original programme also included wonderful performances by Vishnevskaya of the arias 'I could see from my window' and 'I know a lake in the forest' from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and Pristine has wisely dropped the Tchaikovsky (which in any case includes a couple of small but senseless cuts) and replaced it with the Shostakovich arias. The transfers are marginally brighter and more spacious than were the BBC versions although even Andrew Rose hasn't managed to compensate for some lack of inner detail that hampers parts of the Stravinsky ballet. Still, given its date and broadcast origins the sound is pretty impressive and the performances certainly don't want for impact.

THE RECORDINGS



Tchaikovsky
Symphonies Nos 1, 2 & 4, etc
Tilson Thomas, Abbado et al
DG Eloquence Ⓢ ② 482 6168



Tchaikovsky
Symphonies Nos 3, 5, etc
Atzmon, Abbado et al
DG Eloquence Ⓢ ② 482 6176



Tchaikovsky
Symphonies No 6, Manfred, etc
Ahronovitch, Abbado et al
DG Eloquence Ⓢ ② 482 6184



Tchaikovsky. Borodin. Rachmaninov
Varviso, Weller
DG Eloquence Ⓢ ② 482 2888



Stravinsky. Mussorgsky. Shostakovich
Vishnevskaya, Markevitch
Pristine Ⓢ PASC493

Nikolaeva in Prague

Tatiana Nikolaeva's recorded legacy is majorly devoted to Bach and Shostakovich but **'Tatiana Nikolaeva: Prague Recordings'** grants us a rare opportunity to hear this most formidable of Russian piano priestesses in Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto – a big, boldly stated performance supported by the Czech Philharmonic under the sympathetic baton of Konstantin Ivanov. This powerful, objective reading is a far cry from overtly romanticised Rachmaninov, similar in overall style to the sensitive but uncompromising versions by Richter. Nikolaeva's own music – three of her *Concert Studies*, Op 13 in this context – reflects something of Rachmaninov's thunderstruck muse and she unleashes great reserves of power on Prokofiev's Third Piano Sonata, *From the Old Notebooks*, though the rather tinny piano tone makes extended listening something of a trial. The three Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues included (Nos 1, 7 and 15) are similar in both concept and execution to Nikolaeva's second Melodiya recording, though the latter is infinitely better recorded. As for Bach, we're offered the headstrong Fantasia in C minor, BWV906, the Fifth French Suite (with a closing gigue that truly goes for broke) and a highly charged account of the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*. A set that's more of specialist collector interest than an urgent 'must buy' but I'm glad to have heard it.

THE RECORDING



Rachmaninov. Shostakovich. Prokofiev. Bach
Nikolaeva
Supraphon Ⓜ ② SU4218-2

Rediscovering Schnabel

For all her skills, Tatiana Nikolaeva is unlikely to divide critics quite as much as Artur Schnabel. The oft-quoted adage of Schnabel being primarily a musician (rather than a pianist) causes problems for listeners who look for the fire and filigree of virtuoso display. And yet once sampled, the deeper elements in Schnabel's playing are impossible to forget, even in Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata where for all the outer movements' headlong rush – like hurried sketch work – the *Adagio* speaks such an eloquent language that even the best of Schnabel's successors (Solomon, Brendel, Pollini) cannot overcome. My own Schnabel epiphany was while on a wood-side walk with a transistor radio pressed against my ear listening to the BBC Third Programme. What I heard was the 1932 HMV recording of Beethoven's Op 111 – the terrifying call to arms that opens and the sublime pacing at the start of the Arietta (which makes the later 'Beethoven does boogie' passage all the more stirring), not to mention the way that this most affecting theme and variations sails away on a sea of trills, still haunt my memory. As to this 1942 Victor re-make, it loses out in comparison with its predecessor in just one respect: a sense of awe. The two versions of the E major Sonata, both wonderful, are on a more equal footing and when it comes to the Fourth and Fifth Concertos, the high point is the latter's *Andante con moto* where the alternation of orchestral severity and contemplative pianism is well-nigh perfect. Frederick Stock's Chicago Symphony pushes for maximum tension and there seems a genuine rapport between conductor and pianist. But the major revelation here is Schnabel's previously unreleased set of Schubert D899 Impromptus, which achieves considerably more in terms of drive and drama than its 1950 HMV successor. Here we have Schubert playing on the same elevated plane as Edwin Fischer and I'd recommend this generally well-transferred set on its count alone.

THE RECORDING



Beethoven. Schubert
Schnabel, Stock
Sony Classical mono Ⓜ ②
8898 538971-2



Tatiana Nikolaeva appears as both soloist and composer on a new collection from Supraphon

Elevated Haydn

Three more first-release recordings arrive via Audité's latest volume of Deutschlandradio Kultur recordings by the Amadeus Quartet, this batch devoted entirely to Haydn, and including works that the Amadeus never recorded commercially: Opp 9/3, 20/5 and 33/2 (*The Joke*). For the last, the Amadeus cut a forceful profile in the scherzo and make an affectionate beeline for the gentle 'joke' at the close of the finale. Their playing of the F minor Quartet (Op 20/5) suggests implied parallels with Mozart's G minor Quintet in the scherzo, while the lilting *Adagio* is given the loveliest reading imaginable. The C major Quartet Op 54 No 2 features a brief *Adagio* that can only be described as cantorial: the solo violin wails expressively over supportive chords, the effect not unlike the 'beklemmt' passage in Beethoven's *Cavatina* (the Quartet Op 130). We're given a complete recording of the Quartet from 1969 and that movement alone as recorded in 1950, both extraordinarily moving. Fifteen works are included overall (the majority originating in Haydn's later period), including *The Seven Last Words* which is additionally available as a downloadable 'extended version' with German texts. An unmissable collection.

THE RECORDING



Haydn String Quartets
Amadeus Quartet
Audité Ⓜ ⑤ 21.426

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Books



Peter Quantrill reads about the overlap of music and literature :

'Analysis of a verbal "fugue" in Ulysses explains how comprehensively Joyce failed to understand the principles of the musical form'



Charlotte Gardner on the intriguing saga of a stolen violin:

'The more classically knowledgeable may find Gone rather irritating, but if you stick with it there are interesting nuggets'

Music into Fiction

By Theodore Ziolkowski

Boydell & Brewer, HB, 260pp, £19.99
ISBN 978-1-571-13973-3



One can only applaud the endeavour of Theodore Ziolkowski, a Princeton professor of German and comparative literature, in treating a well-worn subject – the intersection of words and music – from a novel perspective. It is, evidently, a late work, a very personal approach to the subject and one informed by a lifetime's study and enthusiasm. The axis of the book turns from 19th- and 20th-century composers who also wrote imaginative prose, to modern attempts to render music within fiction, before twisting back to consider Adrian Leverkühn, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and the most fully developed composer in fiction, from the unfamiliar angle of efforts to bring his music to life.

Attempts to skirt familiar territory have led to some special pleading and odd choices. It suits Ziolkowski's area of specialism to begin with ETA Hoffmann and Weber, though neither could be described as enjoying 'parallel careers' as both writer and musician. *The Damnation of Faust* is given a rough ride for failing adequately to represent its subject, but instead of setting Berlioz's treatment of Goethe side by side with the *Scenes from Faust* over which Schumann laboured for so long, Ziolkowski moves on to *Genoveva*. *The Ring* is entirely passed over in favour of a highly partial critique of *Parsifal*, which gets off to a bad start by announcing that the opera 'amounts to a pastiche of themes and motifs from all Wagner's previous works'. Nietzsche and Debussy are duly summoned as witnesses for the prosecution; Ziolkowski's own judgement must be inferred from the lack of a defence.

There is, too, more outline than picture when he turns to 'the musicalisation of fiction'. Analysis of a verbal 'fugue' in *Ulysses* usefully explains how comprehensively Joyce failed to understand the principles of the musical form, while remodelling it to his own ends. Skipping over the devices of rhetoric where musical comparison is often and aptly made – assonance, bathos, anaphora – Ziolkowski goes in search of more ambitious structural comparisons, and a fool's errand it turns out to be, piling up authors such as Hesse, Broch and Huxley and their almost interchangeable use of specific genres such as sonata, quartet and symphony: terms which on closer examination bear little contextual meaning beyond a perceived aesthetic value conferred by their noble abstraction, as though there were not almost as many bad piano sonatas as novels. Later on, a summary chapter picks up the red herring of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*, sniffs it cautiously and throws it aside ('Its imprecise analogies contribute little to our understanding of compositions in writing') before giving 'I read them so you don't have to' accounts of modern novels built around the *Goldberg Variations* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Looking at – or rather listening to – Leverkühn, Ziolkowski describes in detail an attempt by Humphrey Searle to put notated flesh on the rather dry bones of Mann's own musical descriptions for a BBC radio play. In the absence of a commercial recording, we must take Ziolkowski's word on trust but he is surely peering down the wrong end of the telescope: the putative music of Leverkühn had been written by the composers of Mann's own time, by Debussy, Schoenberg and Mahler. He is instead led astray by the author's faintly preposterous suggestion that Britten could write a *Faustus* opera. A less literal-minded approach would have moved beyond Henze's Third Violin Concerto to hear Leverkühn's heaven-storming ambition to 'take back' the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven rejuvenated in the music of Lachenmann: *Staub*, for example, which mounts an insurrection against not so much the symphony's notes as its exhausted reception history. The work of Bernd Alois Zimmermann presents many parallels in 12-tone technique and abandoned eclecticism, never more jolting than the conclusion of his late and incensed masterpiece, *Requiem for a Young Poet*, which really does 'take back' the *Missa solemnis*.

There's no doubt that the subject continues to draw in writers, artists and their public. In January 2014 the *Doktor Faustus* Concerto of Geoffrey Gordon was premiered in Copenhagen. Earlier this year, too late for Ziolkowski's consideration, there appeared *The Gustav Sonata*, by Rose Tremain, who has woven music and musicians throughout her fiction. In Tremain's *Music and Silence*, and *The Kindly Ones* of Jonathan Littell, may be found a cherishing of musical forms and an understanding of how far and no further they may encompass the business of words. **Peter Quantrill**

Gone

A Girl, a Violin, a Life Unstrung
By Min Kym

Viking, PB, 256pp, £14.99
ISBN 978-0-451-49608-9



As opening pages go, *Gone*'s gets full marks for capacity to send a shiver down a musician's spine. The scene is an airport check-in desk and the book's author, Korean violinist Min Kym, has just been told her violin has to travel in the plane's hold. As a result, all she can now do is to watch helplessly as her instrument shudders slowly away down the conveyor belt, while a sixth sense tells her she will never see it again. 'The violin gives a little start, as if it's been pushed in the back', she narrates, 'something it won't have liked, and then starts to be carried away, slowly disappearing through the rubber straps.'

Turn the page and you discover that this has in fact just been a terrible dream; but it's one rooted in reality because in 2010 Kym's 1696 Stradivarius really was taken from her, stolen as she sat with her boyfriend in Euston station's Pret A Manger. Its loss made international headlines, as did its recovery in 2013, and also its sale shortly afterwards, for £1.385m through the fine-instrument auction house Tarisio. At the time Kym said very little in public other than to express her pleasure at the violin's safe return, but now we have *Gone*, tag-lined *A Girl, a Violin, a Life Unstrung*, and if you're at all of a questioning bent then you're going to find it a rather curious read.

For those (probably most) who need a memory-jog, Min Kym is a former child prodigy who aged seven became the youngest-ever pupil at The Purcell School. At 21 she purchased from Beare's the eventually-to-be-stolen Stradivarius she describes as 'part of me'. Recordings followed: Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* in 2001 with the London Symphony Orchestra and Barry Wordsworth (Claudio, A/02), then in 2008 the Beethoven Concerto with Andrew Davis and the Philharmonia Orchestra (Sony Classical, 4/08). When her violin was stolen in 2010 she had just recorded the Brahms Concerto, again with Davis and the Philharmonia for Sony. After that point, however, her trail goes cold, and *Gone* explains why: how her background as a compliant child prodigy from a patriarchal Korean culture meant that the loss of her violin soulmate left her first silenced and 'unstrung', and then unable to fight for her violin when it reappeared.

Gone is not aimed primarily at specialist classical music lovers, but at a wider audience. Its title echoes Gillian Flynn's multi-million-selling suspense novel *Gone Girl*, as does its self-consciously poetic, statement-like prose. There's also a 'listen as you read' tie-in album on Warner Classics featuring some of Kym's past recordings. Then there's the surrounding publicity, such as a modelling campaign with the clothing brand Finery London.

The more classically knowledgeable, and indeed anyone who prefers a more refined literary style, may find *Gone* rather irritating. But if you stick with it there are interesting nuggets. For instance, Kym's description of life as a child prodigy is thought-provoking: the expectations placed on her, the isolation from her peers, living an adult life managed by adults, and perhaps most interestingly her obsession with other former child prodigies such as Heifetz, plus the bond with her former child-prodigy teacher, Ruggiero Ricci. *Gone* also broaches the issue of the prohibitive cost to musicians of fine instruments. Should a Stradivarius have a life as the voice of a musician, it asks, or as the silently appreciating investment of a collector?



The theft of Min Kym's Stradivarius violin from Euston station in 2010 made international headlines

Of more intriguing interest is Kym's explanation of why the precious Stradivarius was sold when it was recovered. In essence, this was because it no longer belonged to her but to the insurance company that had paid out its value, and she couldn't raise the funds to buy it back within the specified time period because she'd divided their payout between a new instrument for herself and giving financial help to her parents. However, it also seems clear that Kym regrets accepting the advice given by Tarisio, the 'devils in my ear', where Kym's boyfriend worked and works, which encouraged her to buy through them another Strad as a replacement, within her price range because it had been through the wars, rather than an ever-appreciating Guadagnini as advised by Beare's.

Still, she made all her own decisions, and overall her story raises all sorts of questions. How could she be unaware of consortiums of philanthropists who purchase instruments for artists in need? And why did she need one specific violin in order to play?

Then there's the billion-dollar question. Within what professional context does *Gone* now sit? On the one hand its conclusion sets Kym up as a violinist, ending on her recent joyful purchase of a Nicolò Amati instrument, and the words (in staccato prose typical of her writing): 'Don't blame it on anyone. It happened. I was born in Korea. I bowed to my father, took my shoes off before I ate. I played a tune and won a prize. I found my violin. I listened to the wrong man. I was a little Korean girl thrown into a strange world. I was asked to perform without knowing quite who I was. It's still a strange world, I'm still Korean, but I don't bow any more. I know who I am… My Strad is gone but I can play again… My name is Min. I play the violin.' However, if you hunt online you won't find an artist page, manager details or a concert schedule, and my attempts to get clarity from the Penguin press officer assigned to her were met with silence. Perhaps Kym doesn't yet know herself, and is waiting to see what comes of the book.

Those familiar with *Gone Girl* will know that the final twist is that its narrators turn out to be unreliable. It would be wrong and I suspect inaccurate to accuse *Gone* and Kym of that, but certainly its conclusion leaves as many questions hanging as a suspense novel. **Charlotte Gardner**

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUE KIM

Classics RECONSIDERED





Richard Fairman and **Hugo Shirley** marvel afresh at the beauty of Régine Crespin's 1964 Decca recording of Berlioz's Les nuits d'été



Berlioz

Les nuits d'été
Régine Crespin *sop*
Suisse Romande Orchestra / Ernest Ansermet
Decca Ⓜ 475 771-2DM. From SXL6081 (3/64)

This new version is so fine that, even if the other recordings of it (notably by Danco, Steber and Los Angeles) continued to be available, this Crespin would still be my first choice. I have never heard her sound so well. The delicacy and imagination which she brings to 'Le spectre de la rose' make this one of the outstanding vocal performances that the gramophone has offered in our time – or in any time, I am tempted to add. At the passage 'mais ne crains rien' her voice seems to exhale a faint, sweet fragrance. A more poetical, rapt interpretation of the song could hardly be imagined; the colours in the voice fade and brighten (at 'j'arrive du paradis') in perfect response to Gautier's poem. 'L'absence' is also memorably done, and the *lamento*, 'Sur les lagunes', is very moving.

To 'Au cimetière' Crespin has not yet brought the same insight. The tone is rather full and warm at the opening, suggesting an evening sunlight rather than soft moonlit radiance. This poem inhabits the second act of *Giselle*: 'une ombre, une forme angelique passe dans un rayon tremblant'; the passage is beautifully vocalised, rather than communicated as an almost visionary experience; and the tone at the 'parfum faible et doux' of the four o'clock flowers lacks just that soft fragrance so magically suggested in 'Le spectre'. The first song of all, 'Villanelle', is given rather a big, lush performance; here, and in the final 'L'ile inconnue', one's ideal would be Crespin's fine voice united to Danco's finer-drawn line.

The new Decca is an expert recording. It is a disc to prize.

Andrew Porter March 1964

Richard Fairman From the day I first heard this recording I fell in love with Régine Crespin's singing and tried to hear everything she did. Anybody who dares criticise her doesn't want to bump into me down a dark alley at night. Are you sure you want to proceed with this?

Hugo Shirley Happily (unless I've missed some all-important small print), I don't think we're contractually obliged to disagree. And you'll be glad to hear that I think this is as beguiling, seductive and moving an account as I've heard.

RF That's a relief. I'll put the machete away then – at least until I hear what you are going to say!

HS Well, let me start by saying that I initially got to know the work through later interpreters – Susan Graham's luxurious account on Sony Classical (10/97) was the first I owned – and had first heard Crespin on disc in Wagner, as Solti's Sieglinde and Karajan's *Walküre* Brünnhilde. So this disc was a revelation, and I remember being amazed by the intimacy and delicacy. You heard Crespin live and can vouch for the size of her soprano in the flesh, can't you?

RF Some of the biggest singing I've ever heard came in an encore she gave at Wigmore Hall, Frank Bridge's 'Love Went a-Riding'. Geoffrey Parsons had the piano legs rocking in an attempt to keep up with her. But, while it is good to know her voice had such power, you can argue that it is too heavy for these Berlioz songs. We don't actually need it here, do we?

HS No, and it makes the delicacy even more impressive – if that's the word – which is all part of an interpretation that I suppose one can only really describe as properly French. Part of that is also down to the way she uses that voice, too. The intonation often has a hint of tartness, while there's also on occasion a certain 'whiteness' in the tone, which is different from what we hear today, where a lot of interpretations do indeed feel more operatic. Is that how you hear it too?

RF Everything here feels inimitably French to me, sultry as a summer's night in Provence. To start with the voice, the sound is so sensuous, so drenched in emotion, so luxurious in its size and colours, and the very individual timbre isn't lost when she sings quietly. I am listening to 'Le spectre de la rose' as I write and the intensely felt intimacy of the line 'Ce léger parfum est mon âme' has just sent shivers down my back.

HS The first part of that verse is so wonderful for its hushed quality, which means that when the voice opens up just a little – and that's all she needs to do – the effect is all the more magical. And the feather-light orchestral textures conjured up by Ernest Ansermet totally inhabit the same world: I love the gentle lilt with which he accompanies at 'Et sur l'albâtre où je repose'. With lesser artists one could imagine things slowing down, but with them the spell is never broken.


Régine Crespin: a voice 'drenched in emotion'

RF To pick up your point about her intonation having a 'hint of tartness', that is definitely one of Crespin's most distinctive features – the way she can lean into a note, adjusting the pitch as she goes. I hear the effect as wholly artistic, bending the voice to achieve a certain shape of phrase that she desires, or at other times flattening the intonation for expressive ends. One of those occurs at the grieving phrase 'mon âme pleure et sent' in 'Sur les lagunes'. It is like the twinge of a tooth, pleasure and pain.

HS Yes, I was trying to choose a word that was not necessarily critical. It's just part and parcel of her expressive arsenal, and I certainly wouldn't want to hear a Well-Tempered Crespin instead!

RF You mention how intimately she sings, and the 'whiteness' of her voice sometimes. Both of these can be heard in 'Au cimetière'. I have checked the score and see it is marked 'à un quart de voix'. How wonderfully Crespin's 'white' thread of tone captures that. And Berlioz's dynamic marks for the voice in this song range from *pp* to *pppp*.

HS Talking of 'white threads', the shimmering string harmonics as the mysterious figure floats past in her white veil at the end of the fourth verse of 'Au cimetière' really send another shiver down the spine.

RF The shiver quota is getting rather high here!

HS As you point out, though, the dynamic extremes we get throughout are largely just a matter of the performance following what's in the score, something that perhaps happened with Berlioz in the 1960s more than with other then more canonic composers. It's interesting to note too that, according to Andrew Porter's original review, this was only the fourth recording of the work and that when it was released the others were unavailable!

RF Since then, of course, we've had so many. Every permutation has been investigated, female singer or male, piano accompaniment or orchestra, one voice or six, as the dedications in the original orchestral score suggest. I remember how striking I found John Eliot Gardiner's recording, with multiple singers, when it came out. The airy lightness of his performance takes the songs into another world. It's so different that I hardly feel we can compare it with Crespin and Ansermet.

HS Yes, it's a definite case of breathing the air of different planets. And, although the previous three recordings Porter cites (from Suzanne Danco, Elena Steber and Victoria de los Angeles) were also sung by women, you wonder whether Crespin played a role in cementing a mezzo or soprano as the standard choice in the cycle. One small textual point, though, do you know why she reversed the standard order of 'Sur les lagunes' and 'Absence'?

RF No, I don't, sorry. It doesn't bother me, though. What I do find troubling is the shabby orchestral playing from the Suisse Romande Orchestra, which we haven't really mentioned yet. Wind chords are never together or properly balanced. Everything sounds below par to me …

HS Hmm, yes, the players certainly struggle, especially whenever there's a *rit* or *accelerando*, and their contribution doesn't stand up to much close scrutiny by modern standards. Maybe I let myself listen a little 'impressionistically' to the orchestral accompaniment, though, so it doesn't bother me too much: it's part of the inimitable whole. And, from what you've said, it doesn't sound as though it has ever seriously hampered your enjoyment. Am I right in thinking you see it as a 'classic'?

RF I will always treasure Crespin in *Les nuits d'été*. I suppose it depends what you mean by a 'classic' recording. This is not a perfect performance in the sense that everything is spick-and-span, or necessarily an everyday listening recommendation, and it certainly isn't authentic according to what we currently understand as period style.

HS That's an interesting way of putting it, which suggests a sort of paradox: this might not objectively, given those drawbacks, be a top 'library choice', but it is nonetheless an essential recording – and definitely qualifies for that classic status. Similarly, in some ways it sounds dated, while in others, mainly to do with the wonderful quality of the singing, it is still irresistibly fresh.

RF For me this recording stands out as an inspirational experience. Every time I hear it I come away intoxicated afresh by the sheer heart and beauty in the singing. No other performance has moved me half as much. Thank you, Crespin! You have left us a marvel.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ELFRIEDE HANAK/DECCA

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Broadway musicals

Musicals are many and varied, with several employing techniques from the the world of opera. **Adrian Edwards** selects his favourite recordings of some of those that originated on Broadway

In May 1953, Kenneth Tynan, theatre critic of London's *Evening Standard*, in his review of the West End premiere of *Guys and Dolls*, wrote that he doubted whether the London Coliseum had ever heard a fugue before. He was referring to the opening number, 'Fugue for Tinhorns', where three punters at the races are picking their winners for the day. Frank Loesser's innovative stroke to open his 1950 Broadway show with a fugue wasn't his only nod to the past. His songs in their Broadway jargon explore the old device of recitative ('What's playing at the Roxy? / I'll tell you what's playing at the Roxy…'), echoing Monteverdi's declamatory style from 350 years earlier. Loesser went on to write *The Most Happy Fella* (1956), where the emphasis is on music rather than spoken dialogue. It's laced with recitatives, arias, duets, canons and choral numbers; and although he refused to call it an opera, it leaned heavily in that direction. So from the same source, the same genre is taken in two different directions.

The book, music and lyrics form in which *Guys and Dolls* sits dates back to the 1870s when WS Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* took New York by storm. The literacy and wit of *Pinafore*'s words and the artistry and invention of its music carried the far-fetched story to a plausible ending. The influence of G&S can be found in such disparate figures as George and Ira Gershwin in their political satires *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and *Let 'em Eat Cake* (1933) and Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner in their songs for Higgins in *My Fair Lady* (1956), Gaston in *Gigi* (1958) and King Arthur in *Camelot* (1960).

Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* (1956) was a valentine to operetta. Before Bernstein there was Rudolf Friml, Sigmund Romberg and, above all, Victor Herbert; but their style was essentially European, harking back to that great pre-First World War success – Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* (1905).

It was the next generation of European émigrés, Loewe and Kurt Weill, both from Germany, who acquired an American identity. Budding American composer of light music Jerome Kern achieved his own breakthrough with *Show Boat* (1927), which incorporated leitmotifs as well as giving a prominence to its librettist, Oscar Hammerstein II, as a partner of equal importance. Opera seldom mentions the librettist in the same breath as the composer, and perhaps that is understandable given that it is through-composed whereas the musical relies on dialogue.

The personalities of all the major figures in American musical theatre are readily identifiable through their melodic, harmonic and rhythmic traits and settings of lyrics. Irving Berlin and Cole Porter did both, others worked in teams with no less consistency of approach. Richard Rodgers wrote the music for Lorenz Hart's lyrics first, then reversed the procedure with Hammerstein, giving him the poetic licence to compose *Oklahoma!* (1943). Hammerstein bequeathed Stephen Sondheim, an iconoclast in theme and technique. Now we wait with bated breath for a successor. G



The 1955 film of Guys and Dolls, with (left to right) Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra and Vivian Blaine

PHOTOGRAPHY: PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Bizet/Hammerstein

Carmen Jones
Marilyn Horne *mezzo*
Orch / Herschel Burke Gilbert
RCA (4/55; 7/74)

In using Bizet's music for his book and lyrics in 1943, Hammerstein made no additions and only negligible deletions. His lyrics fit the music perfectly, and the recitatives are replaced by spoken dialogue as Bizet originally had intended. *Carmen Jones* is set in a southern US state rather than in Seville, and Otto Preminger's 1954 film, from which this is the original soundtrack, features a riveting performance by Dorothy Dandridge miming to the voice of a young Marilyn Horne.



Loewe

My Fair Lady
Rex Harrison *act* Julie Andrews *sop* Orch / Franz Allers
Sony

Each score written by Loewe and his lyricist Lerner (to whom the composer was more than happy to play second fiddle) carried a disarming simplicity that was derived from Loewe's strong diatonic approach to a tune and his unfailing ability to catch the period setting. Loewe breathed new life into the patter-song for Higgins and fine-tuned it to fit the irascible and supercilious characterisation by Rex Harrison, heard here in the original Broadway cast recording (1956).



Kern

Show Boat
Frederica von Stade *mezzo*
Jerry Hadley *ten* Ambrosian Chor, London Sinfonietta / John McGlinn Warner Classics (11/88)

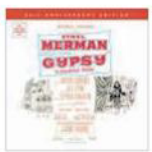
This is music of compassion and tenderness hitherto untapped by Kern. In 1987, John McGlinn and EMI did it proud with a recording that goes back to the score of the very first performance (1927) before cuts were made, orchestrations altered and lyrics amended. An appendix also features all the material added and subtracted from the opening night onwards. It won the first *Gramophone* Award for Music Theatre (1989).



Gershwin

Porgy and Bess
Cynthia Haymon *sop* Willard White *bass* Glyndebourne Chor, LPO / Simon Rattle
Warner Classics (6/89)

Trevor Nunn's Glyndebourne production swept audiences off their feet, and this is Sir Simon Rattle's multi-award-winning 1988 recording of it. Gershwin had been studying counterpoint and fugue before he embarked on the work, which premiered in 1935. Being sung from start to finish, it is truly a grand opera. This recording is essential to appreciate the breadth of Gershwin's conception.



Styne

Gypsy
Ethel Merman *mezzo*
Orch / Milton Rosenstock
Sony (12/62)

An operatic mad scene in a Broadway show seems unlikely, and yet in the final number, Rose, now deserted by her daughters, struts and sings about what a standout performer she could have been. Her breakdown is set to music constructed in part from fragmentary reprises of Jule Styne's music by lyricist Sondheim (who oversaw this part of the original 1959 Broadway cast recording owing to Styne's absence), her stammer on the word 'momma' denoting the moment of near collapse.



Sondheim

A Little Night Music
Glynis Johns *mezzo*
Orch / Harold Hastings
Sony (7/74)

Sondheim's initial idea for this show was to write a piece in the form of a theme and variations along the lines of his favourite set by Rachmaninov: the *Paganini* Rhapsody. Indeed, there's a similar cathartic moment in Rachmaninov's 18th variation and 'Send In the Clowns'. 'Night Waltz' is styled after Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, and forms the haunting link that appears in many guises in 3/4 time in this much-loved musical. This recording is of the original 1973 Broadway cast.



Bernstein

West Side Story
Carol Lawrence & Larry Kert *sgrs* Orch / Max Goberman
Sony (1/59)

Bernstein said that his score was based on a tritone (the opening two notes of both the 'Jet Song' whistle and 'Maria'). At least one number, 'One Hand, One Heart', was originally written for another show. It's the weakest, and highlights the contrast between the sentimental songs and the physical energy and nervous excitement that Bernstein responds to so well in his Jets and Sharks music with its electrifying and unconventional rhythms. This is the original 1957 Broadway cast recording.



Weill

Street Scene
Kristine Ciesinski *sop*
Richard Van Allan *bass*
ENO Chor & Orch / Carl Davis
TER (11/91)

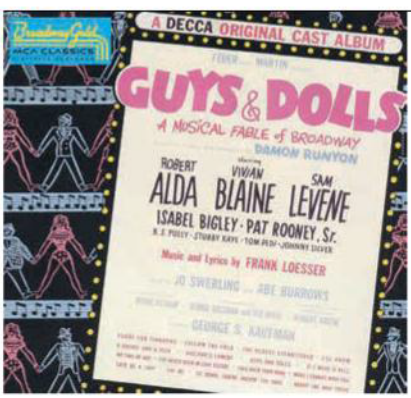
Weill's most eclectic score ranges from the jitterbug rhythm of 'Moon-Faced, Starry-Eyed' to Ann Maurrant's aria of Puccinian breadth, 'Somehow I Never Could Believe'. It took more than 40 years for *Street Scene* (1947) to arrive in London, and it drew crowds for several seasons at ENO, fulfilling Weill's wish that it be staged in European opera houses. The 1989 ENO recording is enhanced by the cast's stage experience.



Rodgers

On Your Toes
Christine Andreas & Lara Teeter *sgrs* Orch / John Mauceri
TER (10/83)

This 1936 show brought the dream ballet (a self-contained dance sequence offering commentary on the action and sometimes giving away what the characters are thinking) to Broadway with 'Slaughter on Tenth Avenue', choreographed by George Balanchine, with its sinuous melodies and jazzy rhythms. The show's 1983 revival (of which this is the Broadway cast recording) featured the original – snappier and more spine-chilling – orchestration by Hans Spialek.



Loesser

Guys and Dolls
Robert Alda & Isabel Bigley *sgrs* Chor & Orch / Irving Actman MCA

Loesser's score was all that survived the first draft by Jo Swerling of this adaptation of Damon Runyon stories. Swerling still shares the book credit with Abe Burrows, who wrote in *Theatre Arts*: 'We cared about the whole show and nothing went in unless it fit.' Indeed, it's hard to think of other Broadway shows where lyrics and music marry so closely. Loesser's fondness for triplet rhythms adds an intimacy to the melody of each main character. We have Sky's 'My Time of Day', with a sweet tune matching the poetic lyric ('My time of day is the dark time / A couple of deals before dawn'); the confessional 'Adelaide's Lament'; and the ballad 'I'll Know'. The original 1950 Broadway cast recording, with Stubby Kaye rockin' that boat, has never been surpassed.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Walton's Belshazzar's Feast

This cantata is striking for its raucousness, its silence and its feeling of having a heartbeat. There are certain interpretative essentials, which **Andrew Mellor** seeks out in his selection of recordings

The first performance of Sir William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, at Leeds Town Hall on October 8, 1931, reportedly set the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival ablaze. However well you know the piece, it's not difficult to sense why that might have been. But if *Belshazzar* can appear wicked, raucous, barbaric and outlandishly exuberant to us now, what must it have sounded like to polite singers and audiences in Leeds schooled in the smooth oratorios of the Victorian era?

One irrefutable answer to that question is 'louder' – if you can imagine such a thing. Walton spent some time before the London premiere (seven weeks after the performance in Leeds) reducing the score's percussion parts. You can be forgiven for wondering just how much more hitting, scraping, thwacking and smashing this particular masterpiece could take beyond what is notated in the 'reduced' version we know today.

But it wasn't just volume that the good folk of Leeds had to contend with. Walton's angular choral writing was spectacularly difficult for the amateurs of the time, with frequent syncopation, endless shifts in metre and tricky dissonant harmonies. Then there was the text itself. Lady Walton reported that the female members of the chorus were outraged at being asked to sing the word 'concubines'.

That political context may well have contributed to some sense of a *succès de scandale*. But this work's huge sonic and dramatic punches were not conceived purely for effect and were certainly not overly experimental. Walton's voice as an artist was coming into its own, and who should notice such a flowering but a composer of sacred music whose style stood in notable contrast. Not long after he'd heard *Belshazzar*, Herbert Howells noted that two things were clear from Walton's Viola Concerto: 'One was that, in his expression of it, beauty was shot through with pathos. The other, that brilliance in him was glittering, clean, hard, rapier-like. The pathos was not far removed from agony; the brilliance foreshadowed powers that might be devastating.' *Belshazzar*, continued Howells, only confirmed Walton's powers.

Walton's spirituality might feel very different from that of Howells. But it says a lot about Howells that from his aesthetic position high up on a heavenly organ bench he was nevertheless thrilled by Walton's loud but otherwise down-to-earth piece: a cacophonous mash-up of the Lancastrian brass-band tradition, the fast pace of the parlour song, the theatrical ritual of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and the sheer vulgarity of English martial music of the time. Howells, most impressed of all by Walton's use of silence in his score, recognised that *Belshazzar's Feast* breathes in just the same way that much big-boned Bach does.

THE SCORE

What was commissioned by the BBC in 1929 as a short piece for modest instrumental and vocal forces and two soloists somehow metamorphosed into a monster. *Belshazzar's Feast* in its final form calls for large orchestra with four percussionists and added alto saxophone, piano, organ and harps with two separate seven-piece brass bands positioned antiphonally. Add to that a huge double chorus and a baritone soloist.



Belshazzar's Feast, as depicted by Rembrandt (*c*1637)

The story of the downfall of Babylon was distilled from biblical sources into a pointed libretto by Walton's friend and housemate Osbert Sitwell. The composer took Sitwell's fast-paced lead, using a baritone soloist to act as both protagonist and narrator, taking care of detail with two recitatives (the most dramatic moment, when a hand appears and writes on the wall, is entrusted to one of them). The score falls roughly into three sections: the first gives voice to the lamenting Israelites who predict the downfall of Babylon; the second depicts the feast itself; the third is a joyous hymn of praise following Belshazzar's death.

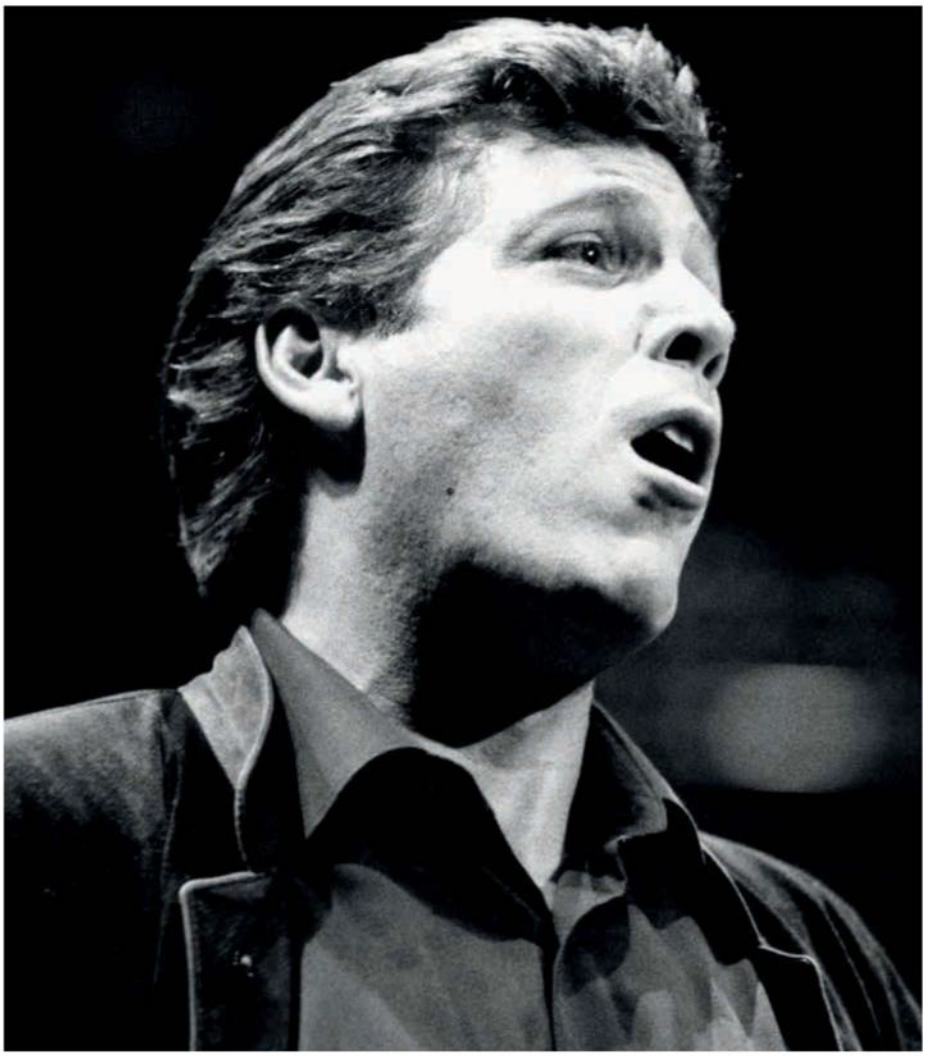


PHOTOGRAPHY: HERITAGE IMAGE PARTNERSHIP LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The triumph of *Belshazzar's Feast* is surely its manipulation of rhythm – not only in the wicked syncopations that characterise the feast and the worship of false gods but also in the teetering *ritardandos* that twist down towards the score's barbaric, vulgar marches. John Williams's score for *Star Wars* borrowed the latter effect right down to the use of anticipatory triplets. Investing these transitions with a sort of natural, human gait – so the music appears to be collapsing almost literally – is one of the interpretative essentials in any recording of *Belshazzar*, and you know instantly whether a conductor has pulled it off or not.

The score's intense orchestral bustle needs care too, not only from an orchestra that should ideally sound a little reckless while actually being in complete control, but also in a sound picture that gives weight, clarity and depth while dealing with the huge register from a basement G in the organ's pedals (often played at a nave-shaking 32-foot register) to three B flats above middle C in the piccolo. There are exceptions to the rule where conditions you might not think are ideal actually work pretty well (Winchester Cathedral for Andrew Litton; the Barbican Hall, London, for Colin Davis), but few recordings are entirely without blemishes that include curdling full-ensemble sound, missed detail or basic lack of presence.

A far bigger variable than orchestral characteristics are those of the choral singers. There are recordings with multiple choirs, single choirs and amateur choral societies with professional or semi-professional stiffeners. No currently available recording offers fully professional singing; in the vast majority, it's possible to hear the strain caused by Walton's demands in a few corners at least. Perhaps the pay-off is the unbridled joy that amateur choirs tend to radiate in this



Thomas Hampson: a 'clean and warm' baritone with the CBSO under Sir Simon Rattle in 1997

roller-coaster score, not least in the string of triumphant alleluias that make up its final furlong.

Although Walton's tempo markings are clear, it's remarkable how little differentiation in speeds exists between recordings. Walton's 1943 first recording is between 33 and 34 minutes long, and the majority of recordings fall around the same mark (Walton was apparently frustrated with the tempos adopted by Sir Malcolm Sargent at the Leeds premiere, which the *Yorkshire Post* described as lasting 38 minutes).

A possible reason for that consistency was referred to earlier. *Belshazzar's Feast* has a heartbeat, and with it a sort of centre of tempo-gravity that most musicians will naturally lock into once it gets going, just as they might in Bach's Passions. This is what feeds those *ritardandos* and cranked-up marches, in which there's a very fine interpretative line between a performance sounding slightly awkward or just right. But it's also connected, surely, to Walton's interest in jazz – music that lives or dies on the naturalness of its pulse. In the 1920s Walton had been writing foxtrots for the Savoy Orpheus Band, and in 1924 he started work on a concerto for two pianos, jazz band and orchestra which was eventually abandoned. Perhaps in the swing of *Belshazzar* – with its clattering percussion, strident piano, slippery trombones, wah-wah trumpets and grooving saxophone – we get a taste of that piece which never was.

WALTON AND HIS TIME

The gramophone was moving beyond its status as an expensive toy just as **William Walton** was coming to maturity. The composer was fêted by both Decca and EMI throughout the 1930s, eventually settling with the latter company, with which he made his first recording of *Belzhazzar* in 1943. That slightly dry and sonically shaky recording featuring the baritone Dennis Noble was followed up by the rather more secure, stereo version from 1959.

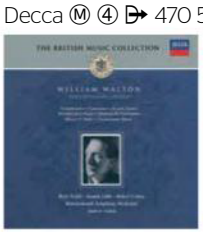
The 1959 version is as much of a 'this is how it should go' as can be expected, notwithstanding some dull singing from the baritone soloist Donald Bell, a slight lack of rhythmic agility and the limitations of the recording technology. Walton demonstrates how to keep a blue flame under passages of building momentum by *suggesting* an increase in speed but not actually instigating one at fig 8 when the baritone's lamentations are echoed by those of the chorus over a stalking bass-line (David Willcocks, Andrew Davis and Simon Rattle manage the same effect).

Walton's performance can sound breathless; was the composer consciously pushing the Philharmonia Orchestra and its chorus to the edge of their abilities? Perhaps – and it's a valid approach. As it is, neither orchestra nor chorus (trained by Wilhelm Pitz) delivers sufficient bite or power for Walton, and the early recording technology can't help but reduce them to a mush when things get complicated. The chief deal-breaker in Walton's recording, however, is probably the shrill, brittle sound of the chorus (particularly its women's voices) that was evidently a feature of the age. Six years earlier,

CHURCH CHOICE

Terfel *bar* **Waynflete Singers; L'Inviti; Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Litton**

Decca Ⓜ ④ 470 508-2DC4



A washy acoustic can kill *Belshazzar* stone dead but this recording from Winchester Cathedral poses a fascinating but unusual sound picture that actually works.

STUDIO CHOICE

Hampson *bar* **Cleveland Orchestra Chorus; City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Rattle**

EMI/Warner Ⓢ ⑪ 697588-2



A good alternative to the 'top' choice, Rattle's studio account is clean, accurate, well played, attractively sung and boasts plenty of depth and impact.

LIVE CHOICE

Coleman-Wright *bar* **London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / C Davis**

LSO Live Ⓜ LSO0681



The sound isn't exactly 'freed' in the boxy acoustic of the Barbican, but it is lent a visceral edge as if in the feasting room itself, and there's not a lot wrong with Davis's pacing.

Sir **Adrian Boult**'s 1953 mono recording with the London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra shows the same pinched choral characteristics. But here, the choir (under the direction of chorus master Frederick Jackson) also seems determined to smooth over Walton's pointed outbursts and angles (there is some recompense of sorts in the huge prominence given to the spiky orchestral piano). The soloist Noble is just as stentorian as he was for Walton a decade previously.

THE AMERICANS

You know you're listening to a non-European recording from **Eugene Ormandy** and the Philadelphia Orchestra with Rutgers University Choir (choir director F Austin Walter) in 1961, firstly from the pronunciation of 'Isaiah' in the opening line ('Eye-say-yah') but also from baritone Walter Cassel's American twang. Ormandy tells you a thing or two about the naturalness that Walton and others find in the music's pacing because he doesn't get anywhere near it. He goes for high drama, but the moments that matter – even in the explosive 'da-da-da-daaa' that is the score's final gesture – feel at best calculated and at worst awkward. The choral singing here is probably the poorest on record despite the choir's youth, and the recording fails to capture the spicy harmonies that do justice to those scintillating rhythms.

Fast forward 28 years to 1989, and **Robert Shaw** has far better-drilled singers in the Atlanta Symphony Chorus, which can seem, at times, to whip its tiring Atlanta Symphony Orchestra colleagues into action. Shaw's is a big, thrilling sound, but detail is too often lost and the weight can lead to exhaustion. William Stone is an evocative singer, particularly when recounting Babylon's wares in the recitative 'Babylon was a great city' (Walton referred to it as the 'shopping list'), but he doesn't handle Walton's difficult intervals well.

BIG NAMES IN LONDON

That *Belshazzar's Feast* is a challenge to conduct is confirmed by **André Previn**'s filmed performance for Walton's 80th birthday, which was televised live from the Royal Festival Hall, London, in 1982. The concentration (or concern?) on Previn's face and the sweat on his brow are telling. It's brilliant to see the percussionists at work in detail and the vehemence on the faces of Andrew Greenwood's Philharmonia Chorus. There is interesting footage of the elderly Walton too (he mouths 'marvellous' from the ceremonial box at the end of the performance). But despite Thomas Allen's huge vocal and physical presence, this is an audio-visual capturing of an event rather than a recording of the piece to live with.



Belshazzar's Feast confirmed Walton's brilliance

Previn had made an audio recording a decade earlier for EMI, that time with the LSO and its chorus, which sounds notably more shrill than the later Philharmonia Chorus. The interesting feature of this recording 'in the presence of the composer' is that it's the slowest there is: the march at fig 27 and the flourishing *Allegro giocoso* at bar 662 both drag. More problematic is a general lack of definition to the choral sound that makes consonants indecipherable and words generally inaudible. John Shirley-Quirk lacks the command that other soloists bring, and his vowels are indistinct.

In between Previn's two recordings came Sir **Georg Solti**'s from Kingsway Hall, London, with the London Philharmonic Choir (drilled by John Alldis) and Orchestra. The performance is big-boned and dramatic, as you'd expect, but not too variegated. With Solti, Walton's little hair-raisers are thrust out: Benjamin Luxon tears into his first entry, and you can't miss the piccolo's three-note salvos with muted trumpets underneath at 'How shall we sing the Lord's song' (did those piccolos catch the ear of George Martin before he orchestrated Paul McCartney's 'Live and Let Die'?).

But there are more subtle signs of Solti's theatrical instinct too: a few pages later at fig 7, when the maestro shows, with his horn section, how a single note can resound with such dramatic shape; and the *sul ponticello* strings at fig 16, which are almost always glossed over. Solti comes short, however, in those *ritardandos* before figs 27 and 38, where the natural segueing of speeds that can really set off those marches eludes him.

BACK TO BRITISH

In that same year, 1977, Chandos made its first recording of *Belshazzar's Feast* with Sir **Alexander Gibson**. The sound picture is pretty uneven, with microphones apparently dropped onto *some* vital instruments but not others. But the general feel here is one of too many passages lacking impact, particularly at pointed choral moments such as 'Thou, O King, art King of Kings' (fig 49).

Chandos's next recording, in 1989, came from the trusty Philharmonia with baritone Gwynne Howell and the Bach Choir under Sir **David Willcocks**, recorded at All Saints Church Tooting, in London. This is very much an account in which singing leads over playing. Howell makes the most of the 'shopping list' and the choir has been shaped with care even if it doesn't sing to the standards we'd expect today. When it comes to the crunch perhaps it's the crunch that's missing – the performance can feel low-octane, and the piece's structure unclear.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1943	Noble; Huddersfield Ch, Liverpool PO / **Walton**	Heritage mono Ⓜ HTGCD225
1953	Noble; London Philharmonic Ch & Orch / **Boult**	Somm mono Ⓕ SOMMCD094 (4/54[R], 5/10)
1959	Bell; Philh Chor & Orch / **Walton**	EMI/Warner Classics Ⓜ 968944-2 (1/60[R])
1961	Cassel; Rutgers Univ Ch, Philadelphia Orch / **Ormandy**	Sony Classical Ⓢ ⑫ 88883 73718-2 (7/62[R])
1972	Shirley-Quirk; London Sym Chor & Orch / **Previn**	EMI/Warner Classics Ⓜ 764723-2 (11/72[R])
1977	Milnes; Scottish Nat Chor & Orch / **Gibson**	Chandos Ⓢ ② CHAN241-10 (11/77[R])
1977	Luxon; London Philharmonic Ch & Orch / **Solti**	Decca Eloquence Ⓢ ② ELQ480 4972 (1/90[R])
1982	Allen; Philh Chor & Orch / **Previn**	ArtHaus Musik Ⓕ DVD 109 110; Ⓕ Blu-ray 109 111
1989	Stone; Atlanta Sym Chor & Orch / **Shaw**	Telarc Ⓑ CD80181 (3/90)
1989	Howell; Bach Ch, Philharmonia Orch / **Willcocks**	Chandos Ⓕ CHAN8760 (1/90)
1994	Terfel; BBC Sym Chor & Orch / **A Davis**	Apex Ⓢ 0927 44394-2 (2/95[R])
1995	Terfel; Bournemouth Sym Chor & Orch / **Litton**	Decca Ⓜ ④ 470 508-2DC4 (10/95[R])
1997	Hampson; City of Birmingham Sym Chor & Orch / **Rattle**	EMI/Warner Classics Ⓜ 556592-2 (9/98); Ⓢ ⑪ 697588-2
2001	Purves; Leeds Philharmonic Chor, English Northern Philh / **Daniel**	Naxos Ⓜ 8 555869 (6/04)
2008	Coleman-Wright; London Sym Chor & Orch / **C Davis**	LSO Live Ⓜ SACD LSO0681

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARY ROBERT/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS, PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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- Saturday 30th September – **Christa Ludwig in Conversation** (in German)
- Sunday 1st October – **Joanne Lunn & Roger Vignoles**
- Monday 2nd October – **Kirill Gerstein**

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'Alluring conviction': Terfel, in a performance under Andrew Davis from the 1994 Proms, is irresistible

Belshazzar appeared to enjoy a recording heyday in the 1990s. The surprise package is from the middle of the decade: **Andrew Litton**'s 1995 performance with his Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Orchestra, who have for company the Waynflete Singers and L'Inviti (as the semi-chorus) drilled by David Hill. The miracle is that the resonant sound, in Winchester Cathedral, actually works: everything is audible partly because Litton's traffic management is excellent and partly because the engineering is so astute. Use of a professional semi-chorus pays dividends in 'The trumpeters and pipers are silent', as so often this passage is scratchy and thin rather than the ethereal gear-change it should be. I hesitate to recommend a recording with the odd strange tempo and in which some of the more fascinating corners of the score can sound as if in the shadows. But Litton's is a recording with an awesome noise and the stamp of an interpretation that works.

Litton's soloist Bryn Terfel is just as evocative in a live performance from the 1994 Proms, singing Walton's 'shopping list' with teasing, alluring conviction. The best features of this performance under Sir **Andrew Davis** are biggies indeed: choral singing that is consistently disciplined, evocative and 'light' when it needs to be (Stephen Jackson's BBC Symphony Chorus sounds fresh and the presence of the BBC Singers makes all the difference); a higher level of articulation overall (note the *sforzandos* in bars 741-43, 'For Babylon the Great is fallen') than heard elsewhere; general agility and panache from the orchestra at high speeds (possibly the highest on record); a real, room-shaking organ sound; and the palpable atmosphere of the Last Night of the Proms. Let's not forget that the latter brings with it the sound of 6000 souls standing and breathing during Walton's pregnant rests and general pauses.

Not even Sir **Simon Rattle** has quite the hold on the push-pull tempo shifts into Walton's marches that Andrew Davis does. His performance comes with studio cleanliness and impressive anticipation and atmosphere, even if it's not off the leash like Davis's (even though Rattle's 1997 CBSO sounds constantly on the brink of letting rip). The recording's key attributes are clarity and structure, which both feed into one another: the overlapping choral paragraphs of the final pages are entirely mush-free. The rhythmic impetus is alive and wriggling under Rattle too, and his baritone Thomas Hampson is clean and warm, perhaps without the final lining of drama that Terfel provides. The joint City of Birmingham Symphony and Cleveland Orchestra choruses trained by Simon Halsey and Gareth Morrell sound relatively bright and agile.

But at least Hampson is more involving than Christopher Purves, who sounds uncharacteristically wooden in his (early career) performance with **Paul Daniel**, the English Northern Philharmonia, the Leeds Philharmonic Chorus, the Huddersfield Choral Society and chamber choir Laudibus. Like Rattle's, this recording from 2001 that returned *Belshazzar* to its Leeds Town Hall birthplace broods even at quiet volumes. Daniel offers some evocative shifts in light, and knows when to change gear sideways rather than up or down (as at the *Allegro molto* at fig 40). The acoustic puts some space around the sound, but the forces have impact nonetheless. Perhaps what's missing is a last dose of flair and technical panache from singers and players.

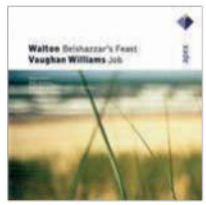
The most recent recording is, like Litton's, an acoustic surprise. The Barbican's cramped stage and LSO Live's characteristically boxy production style conspire to create a compellingly high-pressure live recording from Sir **Colin Davis** and the London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra. Peter Coleman-Wright is a perfect baritone soloist who takes superlative care with the notes but sounds unfailingly evocative too. Davis captures the heartbeat of the piece as well as Andrew Davis and Rattle (his lurch into the march at fig 27 is perfectly timed), but it's the grain of this LSO Live recording that is most attractive: we get variegated textures even at high volumes when the orchestra is tripping over itself like the band crammed into the feasting parlour. If there's any fault, Joseph Cullen's singers can't quite match the choral forces gathered for Rattle and Andrew Davis; and if there was a digital organ on the Barbican stage for the performances in September 2008, it's barely audible.

Something else you don't get from the Barbican is 'atmospheric' silence, which has a funny way of robbing performances of this piece of that final ounce of tension. Perhaps that's why it's a recording with some imperfections and audience noise, from Andrew Davis, that emerges as the most recommendable in the end. Nowhere are Walton's silences more staggering than in the work's final pages, where there are four Handel-style gaps in the music in the last 15 bars alone. 'You can hear your heart beat in any of them,' wrote Herbert Howells. 'And that is not the least of Walton's triumphs.' G

TOP CHOICE

Terfel *bar* **BBC Singers; BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / A Davis**

Apex Ⓢ 0927 44394-2



Perhaps the single most important characteristic of any performance of *Belshazzar's Feast* is a feeling of wicked excitement and intense joy, which this recording delivers best.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC AND ARTS PHOTO LIBRARY /ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

Herkulessaal, Munich

Lahav Shani conducts Brahms and Prokofiev, May 26

Since winning First Prize at the 2013 Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition, 27-year-old Lahav Shani's career has been on an upwards trajectory rocketing at the speed of light. This coming 2017/18 season he becomes Principal Guest Conductor of the Vienna SO, next season he becomes Chief Conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic. This guest appearance with the Bavarian RSO sees him conduct Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* Suite along with Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2 with Rudolf Buchbinder. The orchestra have ensured the performance can be enjoyed by as wide an audience as technologically possible – not only will it be broadcast live on BR-Klassik, there will also be a live video stream on their website's Media Center and on the BR Klassik website, which will be available afterwards if you miss it.

br-so.com/brso-media-center/concerts-on-demand, br-klassik.de

Fort Worth, Texas

Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, May 25 – June 10

Held every four years in Fort Worth, Texas, this major international piano competition was once described rather colourfully by *The Boston Globe* as 'a cross between the Miss America Pageant, the Olympic Games, the Academy Awards and the Pulitzer Prize'. In other words, it's a major event, and the names on the 2017 jury chaired by Leonard Slatkin underline this, because they include pianists Jean-Philippe Collard, Anne-Marie McDermott and Marc-André Hamelin. The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra will perform with the competitors in the semifinals and finals, Nicholas McGegan conducting the Mozart concerto in the semifinal, and Leonard Slatkin conducting the final. The Brentano Quartet also participate in the final round, and this year there are remote reviewing options. If you're in the US then for the first time ever the competition will be broadcast live in selected cinemas nationwide. Everyone else can catch it on medici.tv.

cliburn.org, medici.tv

Kulturpalast, Dresden & Deutschlandradio Kultur

Herbert Schuch performs Mozart at the Dresden Music Festival, May 28

Romania-born and Germany-raised pianist Herbert Schuch is not regularly to be found on British and US shores just yet, but he's a pianist of whom we should be taking note. He first came to international attention when he won three major piano competitions in the space of a single year (2004-05): the London International Piano Competition, the Casagrande Competition and International Beethoven Competition in Vienna. Since then two of his recordings have scooped ECHO Klassik awards. This Dresden Music Festival appearance sees him perform Mozart's Piano Concerto No 20 K466 with Michael Sanderling and the Dresden Philharmonic. Also on the programme is Shostakovich's Symphony No 12.

deutschlandradiokultur.de, musikfestspiele.com

Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg

Insula Orchestra & La Fura dels Baus stage Haydn's The Creation, June 1, 2, 5, 6

French period ensemble Insula Orchestra last month began a residency at the newly opened La Seine Musicale in Paris's île Seguin. One of its celebratory productions is a major collaboration with the Spanish theatre production company La Fura dels Baus, presenting a multimedia production by Carlus Padrissa of Haydn's *The Creation*, based on the story of CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, in Geneva. This month they're touring the production in Germany, bringing it to the Ludwigsburg Festival on

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Kirill Petrenko makes his first Berlin appearance since being named the Berlin Phil's new Chief Conductor



Mozart • Adams • Tchaikovsky

Mozart's *Haffner* Symphony opens not with the animal energy of Claudio Abbado's late accounts – the fire that Mozart said he wanted – but rather an airy grandeur and spirit of *opera buffa* entirely appropriate to the symphony's beginnings in the Burgtheater where *Figaro* also first came to be. Without rushing to place a burden of history upon Kirill Petrenko, the precedents who leap to mind are Beecham and, indeed, Karajan, especially when he follows the score to the letter and omits the exposition repeat.

The development – and the sleepy slow movement – put the symphony on pause without losing momentum, pointing up suspensions that could seem like wilful mannerisms, but for the on-point execution that suggests the orchestra are fully behind their man, rather as football teams run the extra mile for a new manager having got rid of the last one.

Has Petrenko been watching too many Carlos Kleiber videos – were such a thing possible? In the possessed, coaxing flicks and tricks of the finale, you might think so, but he makes the gestures his, and the music also. John Adams's *The Wound-Dresser* receives a performance of almost reproachful tenderness and faultless beauty, even if it would be as well to have Whitman's verse to hand while listening to Georg Nigl's assuaging baritone (the DCH offers no subtitles).

That unsettling, unearthly quality carries over into the wind chorales and string laments (more stretched suspensions) which open Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. The considerable, cumulative effect of this performance relies on a command of rhythm seldom to be encountered at present; the many felicities of texture and balance arise, so it appears, from finding their appointed place in Tchaikovsky's metrical structure – like TS Eliot reading his own poetry, where all the stresses land in the right place and obscurities fall away. It's safe to say that the Berlin Philharmonic knew what they were doing.

Peter Quantrill

Available via various subscription packages to the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

Barbara Hannigan performs the Gramophone Award-winning 'let me tell you', here with Kent Nagano conducting

Abrahamsen



This performance of Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* is new to GSOPlay but actually constitutes the work's second-ever outing in early 2014 and thus pre-dates the *Gramophone* Award-winning Winter & Winter recording from Munich by almost a year. For anyone who has listened obsessively to that recording but hasn't seen the piece being performed, doing so is compelling – firstly given Abrahamsen's strange scoring (that's no ordinary way to handle a celeste…) and secondly given Barbara Hannigan's intense delivery in the white dress she reserves for appearances as Shakespeare's Ophelia.

There isn't much to separate Hannigan's two taped performances. The fiendish coloratura on 'some things we know and some we do not' has gained some confidence but her bell-like resonance, tight, piercing vibrato and ability to pick-out a high note from nowhere with precision and strength is constant. The Gothenberg SO sounds more muted than Andris Nelsons's Bavarian RSO; more atmospheric for the meeting of whistling piccolos with rumbling brass at the start, but less arresting at the bleached waterfall that follows 'you have sun blasted me and turned me into light'. The expressionless Kent Nagano appears happy to let Ophelia do the telling.

Andrew Mellor

Available to watch for free at gso.se.

June 1-2 and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie on June 5-6. If you can't get to those, you can watch Arte's video stream of the production's opening night on May 11 at La Seine, and of course at the same time get a peek at Paris's latest concert hall. The vocal soloists under Equilbey's baton are soprano Mari Eriksmoen, tenor Martin Mitterrutzner and baritone Daniel Schmutzhard.

elbphilharmonie.de, scholssspiele.de, insulaorchestra.fr, arte.tv

Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

Gautier Capuçon's Classe d'Excellence de Violoncelle, June 7

Featured in this slot before, Capuçon's monthly public masterclasses are fascinating for anyone with an interest in how – and sometimes why – artists produce the sound they do. They're also likely to put you on the inside track in terms of awareness of who are likely to be the rising young artists of tomorrow, because Capuçon's pupils have a habit of turning up elsewhere. Take Julia Hagan from his 2014 and 2015 intake, who right now is competing in the Queen Elisabeth Competition. You can watch the masterclasses on medici.tv either live or on catch-up.

fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en, medici.tv

Wigmore Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

Antoine Tamestit and Cédric Tiberghien perform wordless Romantic song, June 12

This programme of Brahms, Berg and Vieuxtemps from viola player Antoine Tamestit and pianist Cédric Tiberghien is one worth making a date with your radio for, either as it goes out live or on catch-up, because it features some particularly interesting transcriptions. Most tempting of all from our perspective is a pair of wordless performances of famous Romantic songs, Brahms's 'Nachtigall' and then Berg's 'Die Nachtigall'. Also of interest is Brahms's F minor Sonata of 1894, originally written for clarinet and piano. Berg's single-movement Piano Sonata No 1 and Vieuxtemps' *Elégie*, Op 30 make up the rest of the programme.

wigmore-hall.co.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

St John's College Chapel, Cambridge

Ben Parry premiere by St John's Choir, June 13

The Choir of St John's Cambridge under their Director Andrew Nethsingha is both particularly active and particularly accomplished in the performance and commissioning of new sacred music. Indeed, anyone who hasn't yet heard their 2016 recording of Jonathan Harvey's works on Signum should hunt it out for a listen. This particular evensong sees the choir's men's voices give the world premiere of Ben Parry's new work, *God in Triumph*, with text by Gareth Bardsley (who was at St John's himself) based on Psalm 47. The service will also feature the music of Herbert Sumison, Organist and Master of Choristers at Gloucester Cathedral from 1928 to 1967, where Nethsingha was Director of Music before moving to St John's. The service won't be broadcast live, but the premiere should be available as a webcast afterwards on the St John's Cambridge website.

sjcchoir.co.uk

Kennedy Center, Concert Hall, Washington

Christoph Eschenbach conducts the National Symphony Orchestra, June 15

This is Christoph Eschenbach's final performance as the National Symphony Orchestra's Director before he steps down at the end of the season, when he'll then assume the position of Conductor Laureate with the orchestra (Gianandrea Noseda is taking over the reins in what will be his first American music director post). In the meantime this looks set to be a momentous and emotional concert, not least because the work Eschenbach has chosen to end his tenure is the one with which he began it back in 2008, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

medici.tv

Caramoor Estate, Westchester & WQXR

'A Night of Italian Opera' gala concert, June 17

This is the opening night gala concert of the Caramoor Festival, in the picturesque Westchester estate's outdoor Venetian Theater, on the outskirts of New York. It celebrates 20 years of bel canto opera at the festival, and taking centre stage is Caramoor's Artist-in-Residence, the winner of the Metropolitan Opera's 2012 Beverly Sills Artist Award, American soprano Angela Meade. This will interest UK readers in particular, given she isn't yet a regular on the UK operatic stage. She's singing with tenor Santiago Ballerini, and they're joined by the resident Orchestra of St Luke's under the baton of Caramoor's Director of Opera Will Crutchfield for a programme of arias, duets and ensembles from *Rigoletto, Aida,* and *Nabucco*, all bookended by the overture and finale from Rossini's *William Tell*, an opera in which Meade has proven herself 'a model of bel canto singing at its finest' (*Chicago Tribune*).

caramoor.org, wqxr.org

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Pictured: Jonas Kaufmann (© Sony Classical/Julian Hargreaves/*Nessun Dorma – The Puccini Album* 2015) who featured on the July 2015 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is £74.75; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (£64); Digital Club (£84); Gramophone Club (£106). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe £22.80, Rest of World £27.00. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

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THIS MONTH An upmarket speaker design from a well-known budget brand, the reinvention of the table radio, and meeting the man behind numerous famous speakers **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

Smart technology meets sleek design

Whether you want a simple system or superior separates, there's something for you this month

Should you be labouring under the misapprehension that Google's Chromecast just means little puck-shaped devices for connection to your hi-fi or TV, NAD has news for you. Its C 338 amplifier 1, which has just been released, has Chromecast built in to allow it to stream content from both your local network and the internet. The £599 amplifier gives the game away with its array of three stubby antennae for Wi-Fi connection – it also has Bluetooth – and will work with hundreds of Chromecast-enabled apps for phones, tablets and computers, playing music with a simple tap of the 'cast' button. It can also operate as a conventional UPnP client for streaming music, for example from a computer or NAS unit on your home network. Described as a Hybrid Digital Integrated Amplifier, the C 338 delivers 50W per channel into either 4 ohm or 8 ohm loads, and also has optical and coaxial digital inputs along with line inputs and even a moving magnet phono stage for use with turntables.

At the other end of the digital spectrum is the all-in-one sonoroHIFI 2, the £1299 German-made system



combining CD playback, FM/DAB+ radio and Bluetooth streaming, along with a three-way speaker system for each channel and twin subwoofers. Built into a high-quality wooden case, the system uses two mid/bass units and a tweeter for each channel, plus those dual opposing subs, all under the control of digital signal processing. Also provided as standard are pre-installed relaxation and meditation soundtracks(!), and the system is said to have been designed 'for all those who are not prepared to settle for anything less than the best possible sound'.

Unashamedly luxurious is the new Sonus faber 'Homage Tradition' range 3, which revamps its Homage speakers to create a new line-up in a choice of finishes: red walnut with black inlays, aluminium inserts and black leather or wenge wood with maple inlays, titanium-finish aluminium and brown leather. Three models are available in the range; the smallest is the Guarneri Tradition at £13,600 per pair including carbon fibre stands, while the two floorstanding speakers are the £17,998/pr Serafino Tradition and the Amati Tradition at £23,500/pr. All three use the company's traditional design, with the cabinet cross-section derived from the shape of a lute, and include the Stealth Ultraflex port for smooth airflow and drivers based on the technology of the company's Il Cremonese speaker. They're available now, with a matching centre speaker, Vox Tradition, due very soon.

Finally this month, a new network receiver from Onkyo 4, complete with processing for Dolby Atmos and DTS:X immersive movie soundtracks. The TX-NR676E is compatible with streaming services including Qobuz, Spotify and Tidal, can stream network-stored music at up to 192kHz/24bit PCM and DSD5.6, and has seven channels of amplification rated at 160W per channel. It sells for £600. G

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The latest Linn recording from William Carter delivers a wonderfully precise and detailed presentation in 192kHz/24bit Studio Master sound.

REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Q Acoustics Concept 500

An ambitious floorstanding speaker sets new standards at the price, thanks to clever design and meticulous tuning

We're probably all familiar with the idea of 'trickle-down' design, in which technology is launched in an upmarket product, thus covering a good chunk of the research and development costs, then eventually finds its way into more affordable models. What we have here, however, is something rather different: 'trickle-up' technology, in the form of the elegant Concept 500 loudspeakers from Q Acoustics. Not only are these floorstanding speakers the most expensive speakers the British-based company has ever offered for sale, at £3995 a pair, they're also by far its most ambitious design.

This is definitely terra incognita for Q Acoustics, which after all started as a manufacturer of inexpensive speakers designed to take on the likes of budget models from Mission, KEF, Tannoy and the rest. That was 10 years ago, since when the company, part of Armour Home Electronics, has been on something of a winning streak. It's picked up awards for just about every product it has launched, and has expanded its offering to a comprehensive line-up encompassing four complete speaker ranges, media soundbar solutions and even a number of custom installation products. But the new model is a giant leap upmarket, not to mention a major statement of intent and ability by the Woking company.

And that 'trickle-up' technology? Well, there's quite a lot of thinking carried over, albeit in an enhanced form, from the more affordable models. That's hardly surprising, given that the design team has been together from the start of the project more than a decade ago. The company brought on board some very respected talent, including industrial designer Keiron Dunk, who set the look of the whole Q Acoustics range, and speaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink. The launch of the speakers at Armour's Woking HQ late last year saw this design team 'breaking cover' – at least officially – for the first time, and the speaker they've all come up with is something pretty special.

> The Concept 500 is a giant leap upmarket, not to mention a major statement of intent and ability

The Concept 500 uses the GelCore cabinet construction developed for the Q Acoustics range, in which layers of MDF sandwich a gel designed so it never sets, thus damping out resonances in the panels by turning unwanted energy into heat. For this new, more advanced design, a Dual GelCore construction is used, with three layers of board and two layers of gel for even greater damping, not to mention the greater stiffness afforded by the thicker material.

The cabinets use P2P (point to point) bracing to stiffen them without the undesirable effects of more conventional global bracing, this being developed using computer modelling and Finite Element Analysis, while within there are Helmholtz Pressure Equalisers to damp out pressure

Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 500



Type Floorstanding loudspeakers
Price £3995/pr
Drive units 28mm soft-dome tweeter, two 16.5cm impregnated/coated paper cone mid/bass drivers
Sensitivity 90dB/1W/1m
Nominal impedance 6 ohm (3.7 ohm minimum)
Recommended amplifier power 25-200W
Finishes White or black gloss, both with wood veneer detailing/rear panel
Dimensions (inc plinth, spikes and terminals, HxWxD) 117.5x40x37.5cm
qacoustics.co.uk

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Concept 500s deserve a high-quality amplifier. Here are a couple of suggestions...

NAIM SUPERNAIT 2



It may be a slimline design with a modest power output but the Naim Supernait 2 is very well suited to the speakers.

ARCAM A49



Big, imposing and with masses of oomph, thanks to its Class G design, the Arcam A49 will drive the speakers hard.

variations within the enclosure. The enclosures sound unusually 'dead' when rapped with the knuckles – it's a hi-fi reviewer thing! – and the company says that the construction and bracing design combine to reduce cabinet noise by 30dB, which is pretty significant when it comes to lowering coloration, thus enhancing resolution and imaging.

While the drive units are relatively conventional – two 16.5cm mid/bass units straddling a 28mm done tweeter – both have been developed specifically for this model. The larger drivers are mounted to one of the internal braces using a self-tightening spring-loaded system, while the tweeter has been designed for wide dispersion, increasing the ideal listening 'sweet spot'. A large rear port tunes the bass, with two-part foam bungs being provided to adjust its effect. The terminals are mounted low down while a panel higher up locates the crossover and provides a +/-0.5dB adjustment of the tweeter level and the whole speaker sits on a skeletal plinth, which stabilises the column.

PERFORMANCE

After spending some time adjusting the set-up of the speakers, I settled on a slight toe-in to firm up the image, the tweeter set to 'flat' and used without the bungs, as this gave the best overall balance. However, should you have to use the speakers close to a rear wall or corners, or have a room prone to bass reinforcement, use of either the outer foam ring or the whole bung with the central part in place will help tame the bass, albeit at a slight cost to the midband presence.

I mentioned 'the best overall balance' but that's selling the Concept 500s short: in fact these speakers sound entirely spectacular when driven with high-quality amplification, which in my case ranged from an all-in-one system from German manufacturer AVM to my usual Naim pre/power combination. And what became clear very quickly was that these speakers have a 'rightness' about their sound that's just as satisfying as their ability to turn on the sonic fireworks when required.

You don't have to drive them hard to hear them at their best: even at low listening levels their superb imaging, broad and deep sound-staging and unforced tonal balance are much in evidence. The speakers are easy to drive, thanks to 90dB/W/m sensitivity and 6 ohm nominal impedance with a 3.7 ohm minimum, meaning you don't need huge amplifier power to get them singing, but it's worth using high-quality electronics upstream of them, so transparent do they sound.

What I really like is the way they reveal so much about the timbres of instruments and voices, whether with an intimate recording of solo instruments or small ensembles or much larger-scale works. The recent Sir John Eliot Gardiner recording of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (SDG, 4/17) sounds magnificently dramatic and rich via these speakers – so much so that I had meant to dip in just to see how they handled it and ended up listening to it straight through in one sitting. The measured heartbeat pulse, the interplay of the two orchestras and choruses, the performances of the soloists – all spring from the speakers into the room in an entirely captivating manner.

It's that ability to create a realistically scaled sonic picture into which one can listen in as much detail as one wants, while still delivering a great sweep of sound, that makes the Concept 500s so appealing. It's the kind of sound I'm used to hearing from high-end speakers driven well; and while these speakers aren't exactly mass-market at £3995/pr, I can't help feeling that to better them you'd have to spend a lot more money. I'm thinking of the likes of the Focal Sopra series or even Bowers & Wilkins 800 Diamond Series here, as speakers able to deliver the kind of unfettered enjoyment and levels of information available from the Concept 500s. Look up the price-lists for those models, and you begin to realise just how much of a bargain this new Q Acoustic model is.

Playing a couple of recent Linn releases – the Royal Academy of Music Manson Ensemble's recording of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* under Oliver Knussen (3/17) and William Carter's 'Bach Reimagines Bach' (5/17) – extended my admiration for these very special speakers. The Stravinsky sounded wonderfully close and warm, with well-balanced voices and instruments, while the ability of the Concept 500s to 'play it small' with the solo strings of the Carter set was just as impressive as their ability to deliver scale and power.

Yes, the speakers are undoubtedly a brave move by this British-based brand – but they also have the wherewithal to be just as disruptive in the high-end as the company's original products have been in the mass-market sector. G

Or you could try...

As mentioned in the review, this is an audacious move by Q Acoustic, catapulting it into the price range where the well-known speaker names start concentrating on all-out performance rather than building down to a budget.

PMC twenty5.23



So the Concept 500 speakers are hardly without competition, being challenged by the likes of the PMC twenty5.23, at £2970 comfortably less expensive. With the familiar PMC 'slanted back' design and a port design inspired by Formula 1 airflow management, they sound big and forceful, while at the same time delivering plenty of detail.

KEF R900



The same kind of money will also buy you KEF's R900 speakers, with a similar driver arrangement to the Q Acoustics one, except here the two bass drivers flank one of KEF's UniQ coaxial drivers, combining treble and mid-range in one assembly. The result is a speaker with extremely good focus and sound-staging.

Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2



If you fancy a less expensive speaker that can deliver a big sound, look no further than the excellent Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2. It's a conventional design, with a tweeter for the treble, a Kevlar-coned mid-range and a pair of bass drivers and, while the design and finish are rather more plain than that of the Concept 500, it's hard to argue with the value for money on offer here at around £1150.

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REVIEW TIVOLI AUDIO MODEL ONE DIGITAL

Style in a small package

A modern classic reinvented for the online music age and a persuasive case for the good old wooden 'table radio'





TIVOLI AUDIO MODEL ONE DIGITAL

Type Desktop radio/network player
Price £279
Sources FM/DAB+ radio, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi
Streaming services supported DLNA playback, Deezer, QQ, Spotify, Tidal, TuneIn internet radio
Inputs 3.5mm stereo line-in
Control via front panel or app on Android/iOS smartphones/tablets
Accessories included Power supply, telescopic antenna
Finishes Walnut, black or white
tivoliaudio.com

We're told there's a rediscovery of radio going on. Listenership figures are up, aided by the increased diversity of platforms on which programmes can be accessed, from TVs and computers to phones and tablets, while the digital radio revolution has opened up even more listening choices – and that's before we get to the thousands of stations available online from around the world.

We've come a long way from the rich-sounding table radio those of us of a certain age will remember sitting around of a Sunday lunchtime – or have we? US-based Tivoli Audio thinks not, which is why it launched its original Model One radio back in 2000, combining wooden casework with a novel radio tuning solution based on mobile phone technology.

The way the Tivoli plays everything means it's so enjoyable that few allowances need to be made

Designed by company co-founder Henry Kloss and drawing on his earlier KLH Model Eight, the Model One was rapidly taken up as a design classic, not least due to its large, geared tuning control and rich, warm sound. Its design has been much imitated in the intervening years, although the original remains in production, and the Tivoli Audio range has expanded to include models such as the portable PAL radio and models with DAB, CD playback and Bluetooth wireless connectivity.

The Model One Digital is the company's latest arrival, and further increases the range of facilities included while retaining the company's celebrated design and warm sonic signature. At £279, and designed and engineered by the company's chief designer Paul de Pasquale, the new model includes not just FM and DAB+ radio tuning but also Bluetooth and Wi-Fi streaming, along with multiroom capability when used with other models in the company's ART range.

As well as playing music from network storage, it also accesses streaming services including Deezer, Spotify Connect and Tidal, along with internet radio stations from around the world using the TuneIn platform. And while the unit itself is mono, albeit with a high-quality speaker tuned with a rear-panel slot port, the electronics are stereo, allowing it to be used with the company's matching ART CUBE active speaker (£189) to create a proper two-channel set-up.

Or you can stream around the home via Wi-Fi to single or paired ART CUBE or ART ORB (£229) speakers, sharing content including streaming music playlists, as well as the sound from devices connected via Bluetooth or even the 3.5mm analogue input provided. So while the Model One Digital is a simple solution for listening in a study, kitchen or wherever, it can also form the cornerstone of a complete wireless multiroom music system. This is much more than just the original Model One with digital music bolted on.

Available in a choice of finishes – wood veneer, black or white – the mains-powered radio has just two main controls: a combined power/source selector/volume knob and what the company calls its MOD (Multi-Operational Dial) bezel, surrounding the colour display. As the name suggests, this control ring offers a variety of functions according to the mode in which the unit is operating: for example, in DAB mode you can turn it left or right to skip stations, press to add a station to preset storage or press and hold to access those presets. In Bluetooth mode the same operations skip tracks or pause and resume playback.

The Tivoli designers have managed to accomplish a wealth of functionality using just two controls, but to make the most of the Digital One and its multiroom ability one really needs the company's app, available free from the Apple App Store (or the Google Play Store for Android), running on a smartphone or tablet. Operating over Wi-Fi, this allows functions such as the renaming of connected devices and grouping of ART speakers to provide stereo or even whole-house operation: it's simple and intuitive, and makes searching for streaming content fast and easy.

PERFORMANCE

It might be expected that listening in mono would take some adjustment after exposure to high-quality stereo systems, but in fact the way the Tivoli plays everything from music to speech means it's so enjoyable that few allowances need to be made. It's been sitting on my desk for quite a while now, playing Radio 3 while I've been working, and I've lost count of the number of times I've reached out and turned up the volume the better to enjoy a piece of music.

Yes, the sound is undeniably rich and smooth, but that's no bad thing given the uses to which this radio is likely to be put. More to the point, it sounds much bigger than any speaker this small should, even making a decent fist of orchestral works, while solo and small ensemble music is suitably detailed and involving, and those Radio 3 continuity announcers and presenters clear and easy on the ear without straying into excessive plumminess.

In fact, the performance of the Model One Digital is sufficiently convincing not to need too much discussion. It offers a lot in a small package, and delivers in a sufficiently enjoyable fashion to make it a firm recommendation for 'second room' use where space is at a premium and style also a requirement. Whether or not you're thinking of an extended multiroom system, it's well worth an audition. G

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ESSAY

The man behind the sound of your speakers

Behind the success of many speakers is a highly professional operation based in Essen, Germany. **Andrew Everard** visits Fink Audio Consulting

What do all the following have in common: the Q Acoustics Concept 500 speakers reviewed on page 116, Mission's recently announced compact LX range, the Naim for Bentley system and the speakers used by one of the world largest car manufacturers, producing some 10m vehicles last year?

The answer, if you haven't already read the review, is found in a building on a relatively anonymous industrial estate on the outskirts of Essen, between Düsseldorf and Dortmund in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Fink Audio Consulting has been in business for more than 20 years, as a speaker design and engineering consultancy latterly expanding into electronic and mechanical design, and, as well as the companies above, has worked with – well, at times it seems it would be quicker to list the companies with which Fink hasn't worked.



Karl-Heinz Fink: a man of many passions

FAC works across home audio and home cinema, car audio and pro audio. Suffice it say that you may not know the name, but you've probably heard its speakers!

I first met Karl-Heinz Fink many years ago, when he was launching a range of metal-coned speakers under the ALR Jordan name, and even from the little 'Entry' range I could tell something special was going on. Since then our paths have crossed many times, from the days when FAC was operating in premises in the centre of Essen – over a rather good camera shop, if I recall correctly – so I thought I was long overdue a visit to the current operation to see where all those speakers are developed.

Enter the upstairs office complex and you might be fooled into thinking you were visiting a guitar company: the instrument is one of Fink's passions (along with cameras, wristwatches and almost anything to do with computers). As a result, the expertise of the in-house woodworking shop – ostensibly there to allow rapid prototyping of cabinets – has also been turned to making necks and solid bodies for electric guitars. Classics, and in-house designs and modifications, hang along the walls of the entrance corridor and there's an enviable collection in a rack beside Fink's desk in his large open-plan office, while the shelves behind him are lined with effects pedals and other related trinkets. Talking about the company, he picks up and tunes a guitar, takes long and detailed Skype calls with clients about some aspect of a work in progress and even fits a newly acquired vintage lens on to a modern camera body and lines up a shot or two.

> At times it seems it would be quicker to list the companies with which Fink hasn't worked

The wide-ranging discussion is admirably frank, with none of the usual 'we can't discuss that' or 'that's off-limits' I often encounter in such circumstances. Fink just loves talking speakers but admits that, while his company is much in demand, it doesn't know all the answers. And while the facility in Essen is obviously very well equipped – with advanced measuring facilities, an excellent listening room, both an anechoic chamber and a room with controllable reflectivity and several rooms in which team members are working away at their areas of expertise – Fink points out that there's much more to it than having all the right kit.

Indicating the equipment the company uses to measure every element of the behaviour of drive units – as well as its woodworking shop, there's also an off-site facility able to construct small runs of drive units – he says that much more important is the expertise within the small, close-knit team and the ability to ask the right questions of the measurement systems, and interpret the results they give. It's an ongoing learning process, he says, but admits, 'Basically, I'm lazy: I don't want to do the same thing over and again until we get it right. Instead I want to have the knowledge to do it right first time, then move on to something else.' That's why extensive use is made of computer modelling and Finite Element Analysis: most of the work is done in the virtual dimension, so there are fewer surprises when actual components are made. If that's important when we're thinking of hi-fi speakers, imagine how much more vital it becomes when FAC is designing drive units for use in cars: a major manufacturer might be commissioning production runs in the millions of units, so problems could just get a little costly.

At the other end of the production spectrum is FAC's first 'own-brand' loudspeaker. First teased at the 2016 High End Show in Munich, where it was used for demonstrations of the pre-production Marantz 10 Series player and amplifier, this monster speaker was originally intended as no more than a demonstration of what the company could do – as if any proof were needed, given the success of many of its client projects.

However, the speaker attracted so much interest that, just before you read this, Fink will have been back for High End 2017 – but this time with his own room, a design with another year of development under its belt and an only slightly eye-watering price tag in mind. The idea is now to make the speakers in very small quantities – we could be talking about a euro price approaching six figures, after all – to be handbuilt in-house in Essen, and delivered and installed in the buyer's home by Fink himself, along with a room acoustics consultancy to make the most of the speakers' already prodigious sound.

Having put his toe in the water with this personal project, it seems Fink is rather looking forward to life as a high-end speaker manufacturer – but then there are still all those clients clamouring for his services, too… G

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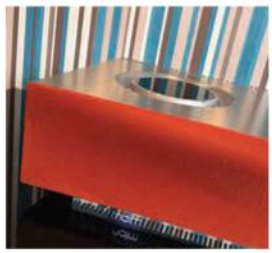
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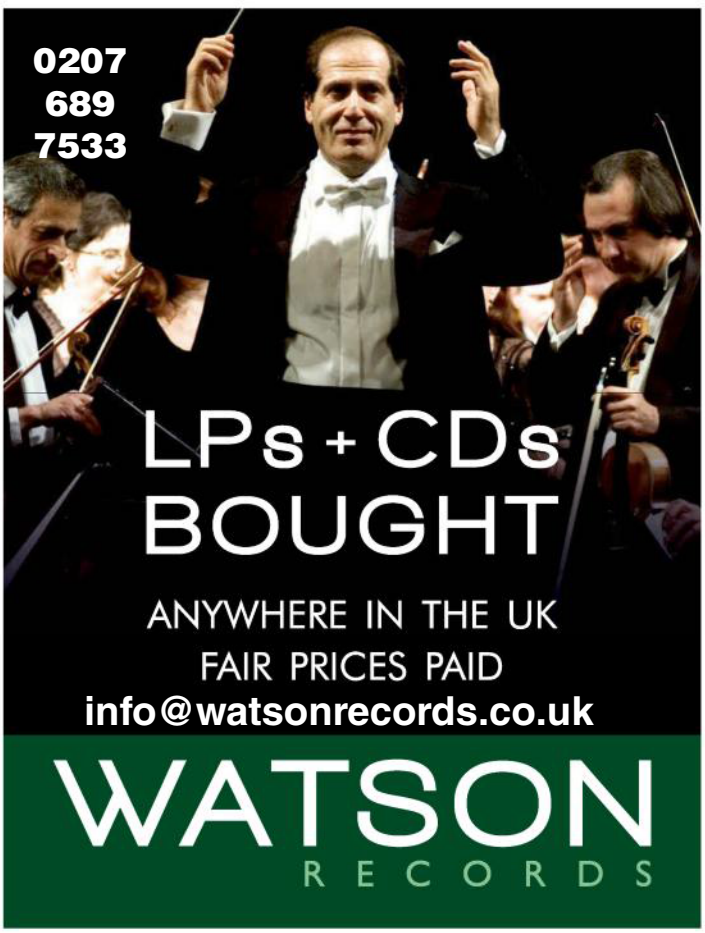




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NOTES & LETTERS

The 'transformative' David Daniels · Celebrating Simon Preston · Weber's 'opera in the woods'

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The art of Simon Preston

I hugely enjoyed the recent Icons feature on Simon Preston (December, page 80), but can't help feeling that too much of his work as choir trainer and organist has dropped off the radar, especially for younger listeners. A good many of the marvellous Argo recordings he made in the 1960s and '70s have never been reissued, and others only partially. Might Decca do for him what it did so splendidly for David Willcocks last year, and offer a complete retrospective?

To my ears, still the best introduction to the riches of the Elizabethan choral tradition comes on an LP, 'Tudor Anthems', that Preston recorded with Christ Church (OUP, 7/79). That, too, has never been reissued on CD to my knowledge, and nearly 40 years after it was made, it needs to be. It's a brilliantly selected anthology, and the performances are simply stunning.

Martin Brooke
Sherborne, Dorset

Oz's best-kept choral secret

I was thrilled this Holy Week and Easter to watch services from St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Sydney on YouTube. The various ceremonies were impressively performed and magnificently sung by the Cathedral's choir of men and boys.

On their website the Cathedral declares the choir to be the best in Australia but I think they compare favourably to the Choir of Westminster Cathedral. It seems that an audio recording of the choir was made a few years ago but seems not to have published, as far as I can tell (an opportunity for Hyperion?). Meantime, I urge readers to check them out on YouTube. They well may be Australia's best-kept secret.

Alan Masters
Auckland, New Zealand

When the space dictates

In her review of a recent Hyperion release by the Choir of Westminster Abbey (February, page 72) Alexandra Coughlan writes that the director's musical choices are 'dictated by the constraints of the space [in which the music was recorded] rather than evolving organically from the needs of the repertoire itself'. But isn't this always, or at least shouldn't this always be, a consideration? The venue in which music is played always alters the sound. I once attended a traditional New Orleans jazz concert performed in a cavernous aviation hangar. I've seen Bob Dylan and his band play in a hellishly reverberative hockey arena. I've heard an eight-member madrigal group sing in a massive cathedral. In all of these cases, the performers were unfortunately defeated by the acoustics.

Music is not just what emits from an instrument or what issues from the mouth of a singer. It's the total effect, shaped by whatever environment in which it occurs. 'Constraints of the space' always need to be factored in, whether it's a live concert or a recording session that's in the offing.

David English
Somerville, MA, USA

Music of the forest

While I enjoyed Andrew Mellor's interesting Specialist's Guide to Music of the Forest (May, page 110), I was surprised that he omitted to mention surely the greatest piece of sylvan music of all - Weber's *Der Freischütz*.

Letter of the Month



The American countertenor David Daniels sparked a new style of countertenor singing in the 1990s

Why David Daniels is a vocal game-changer

I was delighted to read the cover story on countertenors in April's *Gramophone* (page 10). But I believe you have underestimated the transformative significance of David Daniels's career. His rise in the early 1990s was the turning point for the fortunes and possibilities available to this voice type. The virility of his voice and the masculine energy of his portrayals in early roles such as Nerone were electrifying. The article refers to him as an 'exotic star'; however, it wasn't exoticism but authenticity that he brought to the stage.

Terry Serres
Minneapolis
MN, USA

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PRESTO CLASSICAL

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Premiered in 1821, this work was the first quintessentially German Romantic opera, set deep in the forest, the music throbbing with all its mystery, magic and supernatural force. Forest – which still covers a third of German territory – forms a key part of the country's national character, hence the huge popularity both then and now of Weber's great opera in the woods.
Christopher Follett
London NW3

Richter corrections

Gramophone critic Bryce Morrison, reviewing a boxed reissue of Sviatoslav Richter recordings (April, page 109) incorrectly refers to 'the 1958 Prague recital with its incomparable Liszt' when he surely means the 1958 Sofia recital which has been issued many times by Philips (Richter did not play in Prague during 1958).

Morrison also errs in referring to Nina Dorliak as Richter's 'wife'. Several years ago it was definitively established that they were never actually married.
Donald Manildi
International Piano Archives at Maryland
University of Maryland
MD, USA

OBITUARIES

Two British string players, a German tenor and a Swiss clarinettist

NONA LIDDELL

Violinist
Born June 9, 1927
Died April 13, 2017



A passionate orchestral and chamber musician, Liddell led the London Sinfonietta from 1970 until 1994. She also led the Monteverdi Orchestra and the London Bach Orchestra, and appeared as guest leader of a number of London ensembles. Lidell was a member of the English Quartet from 1957 to 1973, as well as both the Richards and London Piano Quartets. She also taught at the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity College of Music.

ENDRIK WOTTRICH

Tenor
Born October 13, 1964
Died April 26, 2017



The German tenor has died at the age of 52 after suffering a heart attack. He studied in Würzburg and New York before making his stage debut in Wiesbaden. In the 1990s he appeared at the State Opera in Berlin and made his Bayreuth debut as the Young Sailor in *Tristan und Isolde* in 1996. He appeared regularly with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and they made several recordings together, including Weber's *Der Freischütz* (Wottrich singing Max). Latterly, he took on heavier Wagner roles including Tannhäuser, Parsifal and Siegmund.

EDUARD BRUNNER

Clarinettist
Born July 14, 1939
Died April 27, 2017



Born in Basel, where he later studied, Brunner was, for 30 years, first clarinet of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. He also taught at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Saarbrücken. He performed regularly as a soloist and chamber musician and recorded extensively (among his numerous discs were the complete works for clarinet by both Stamitz and Spohr). He also commissioned and premiered many new works from living composers, including Kancheli and Françaix.

KEITH HARVEY

Cellist
Born April 13, 1938
Died April 28, 2017



Harvey was a founding member of the Gabrieli Quartet, which formed in 1966. They gave numerous concerts, playing the premieres of quartet music by Alwyn, Britten, Maw, Panufnik and McCabe, and recorded extensively. They also gave the UK premiere of the Sibelius Piano Quintet. Before joining the Gabrielis, Harvey was the youngest principal cello of the LPO, later moving to the ECO. After study at the Royal Academy of Music, Harvey won the Suggia Prize and travelled to California to work with Gregor Piatigorsky.

NEXT MONTH
JULY 2017



Karajan's Ring cycle, half a century on
Hugo Shirley revisits the groundbreaking project that burst into life 50 years ago

Blomstedt turns 90
Philip Clark meets the lauded conductor as he prepares to celebrate his 90th birthday

A life in song: Véronique Gens
Richard Lawrence speaks to the French soprano as she releases a new recording that celebrates women in 19th-century opera

Telemann: Tafelmusik
David Vickers surveys the current recordings of this major anthology

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HORTUS *editionshortus.com*

Thilloy Khojaly 613. *Rakcheyeva/Toiron/Mulhouse SO/Ibrahimov.* Ⓕ **HOR553**

HUDDERSFIELD CONTEMPORARY RECORDS *hud.ac.uk/hcr/*

Cassidy. Lim Wreck of Former Boundaries. *Elision Ens.* Ⓕ **HCR13CD**

HYPERION *hyperion-records.co.uk*

Franz Songs. *Tritschler/Johnson.* Ⓕ **CDA68128**

Nenov Pf Conc. Ballade No 2. *Varbanov/RSNO/Tabakov.* Ⓕ **CDA68205**

Ravel Pf Concs **Falla** Nights in the Gardens of Spain. *Osborne/BBC Scottish SO/Morlot.* Ⓕ **CDA68148**

Stanford Preludes. *Haywood.* Ⓕ **CDA68183**

KAIROS *kairos-music.com*

Czernowin Wintersongs. *Czernowin.* Ⓕ **0015008KAI**

LINN *linnrecords.com*

Sibelius Syms Nos 1 & 6. *BBC NOW/Søndergård.* Ⓕ **CKD502**

LSO LIVE *lso.co.uk*

Mozart Gran Partita. *LSO Wind Ens.* Ⓜ **LSO5075**

LYDIA

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Rimsky-Korsakov Coq d'or (r1968). *Sols/All-Union Rad & TV Orch/Kovalyov/Akulov.* Ⓜ ② **MELCD100 2331**

Tchaikovsky Seasons. *Sergey Mazaev QUEENtet.* Ⓕ **MELCD100 2474**

MSR CLASSICS *msrcd.com*

Hall, J Songs. *Taylor/Narucki/Hall/Berman.* Ⓕ **MS1603**

Mozart Pf Qt No 2. Ob Qt. 'Kegelstatt' Trio. *Gallant/Pinkas/Adaskin Stg Trio/Ens Schumann.* Ⓕ **MS1447**

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Scarlatti, D Cpte Kybd Sons, Vol 19. *Filipec.* Ⓜ **8 573590**

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Viardot Deutsche Lieder. *Alexandra/Schneider.* Ⓕ **OC1878**

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ONDINE *ondine.net*

Brahms Liebeslieder. *Latvian Rad Ch/Liepiņš/Kļava, S & D.* Ⓕ **ODE1295-2**

ONYX *onyxclassics.com*

Prokofiev Pf Concs Nos 1 & 3. *Trpčeski/RLPO/Petrenko.* Ⓕ **ONYX4140**

Rachmaninov Pf Sons. *Hayroudinoff.* Ⓕ **ONYX4181**

ORCHID *orchidclassics.com*

Prokofiev Vn Concs Nos 1 & 2. *Trusler/BBC NOW/Llewellyn.* Ⓕ **ORC100070**

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Schubert Songs (pp1982). *Moll/Garben.* Ⓕ **C021 821A**

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Lonati Sonate da camera. *Letzbor/Ars Antiqua Austria.* Ⓕ **PC10363**

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Various Cpsrs Org Wks in 19th-Century Sardinia. *Ajossa.* Ⓕ **TC800007**

TADLOW *tadlowmusic.com*

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Tansman Pf Wks, Vol 2. *Zelibor.* Ⓕ **TOCC0265**

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DYNAMIC *dynamic.it*

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NAXOS *naxos.com*

Puccini Bohème (pp2014). *Sols/Malmö Op Orch/Badea.* Ⓕ DVD **2 110385;** Ⓕ Blu-ray **NBD0059**

OPUS ARTE

Puccini Ops. *Various artists.* Ⓢ ⑥ DVD Ⓡ **OA1240BD**

Rossini Barbiere di Siviglia. *Sols incl de Niese & Corbelli/Glyndebourne Op/LPO/Mazzola.* Ⓕ DVD **OA1238D;** Ⓕ Blu-ray **OABD7218D**

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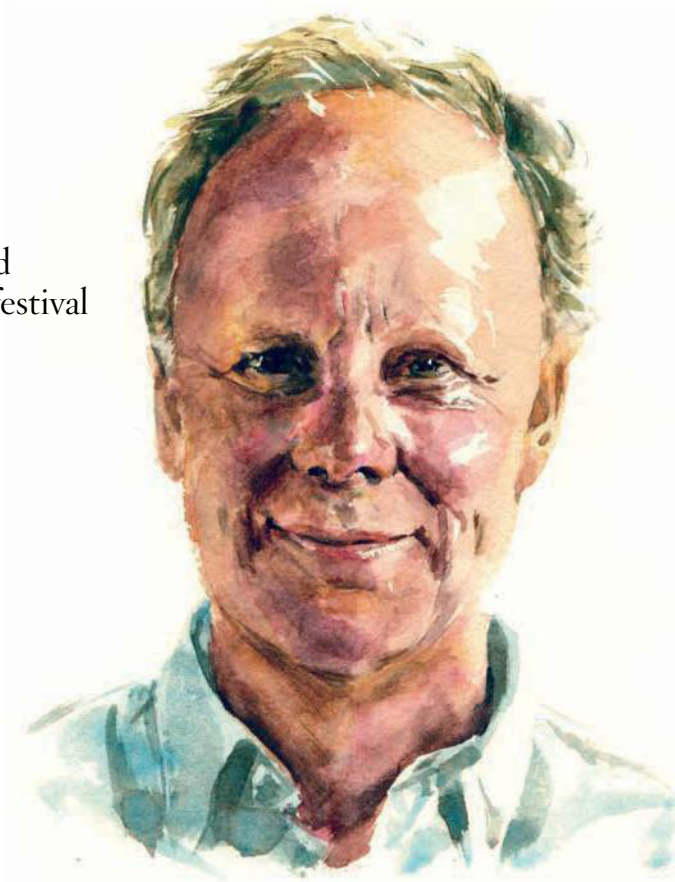
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Kim Wilkie

The landscape architect on learning the flute and restoring the grounds around The Grange opera festival



It was not until I was at Oxford, really, that I became aware of music. I was born and bought up in Malaysia, then Hong Kong and then Baghdad. There was no television, no radio, and I think we had about six records. But mostly it was about silence or about the sounds of the animals round about. In Malaysia we were right on the edge of the jungle, which has an extraordinary music of its own. In the desert it's a much cleaner, crisper sound – you hear a fox way off in the distance. So I didn't really come across music properly, or anything to do with current affairs, shockingly, until I was at Oxford.

I then had a very good friend who introduced me to all kinds of music, and particularly to Choral Evensong. In a way it was great that music then deluged in at that stage. I had rooms opposite the Holywell Music Room, where they did a wonderful series of playing a piece of Haydn, and then Mozart, and then Beethoven. For almost a full year I would go and just listen – mostly to string quartets – so that is a period of music I very much enjoy. As I get older, again silence is very precious too. Fortunately what I've managed to escape is music as background noise. It's something you turn on very deliberately.

After Oxford I spent a year in the Andes working up on the Imbabura Volcano with the Otavalo Indians. I spent a lot of time wandering in the mountains on my own, in between teaching Spanish and weaving, and managed to get one of the local flutes, which I taught myself to play, extremely badly. It was that kind of adolescent thing of being an Arcadian shepherd I guess! Because of that I particularly love flute music. I carried on teaching myself and playing quite a lot, and when I came back decided to get proper lessons. I went along to my first lesson and the teacher said 'you clearly love music, you love playing music…the only trouble is that the wonderful sound you're hearing in your head bears no resemblance to the awful sound that's coming out of your flute!' That rather crushed me and took some of the enthusiasm out of it. It did make me listen properly, but I didn't carry on and do it as assiduously as I should have done.

I've been doing some work in Russia, and Russian choral music seems to be a couple of octaves lower, and the reverberation within those churches, when everybody's standing up generally around the icons, and you come in from minus 20 outside and everyone's wrapped in furs, and there's the incense and the candles and the extraordinary voices – that's possibly about the most powerful musical experience I've had.

About three years ago the Baring family asked me to look at the wider landscape of The Grange. In the 18th and 19th centuries they created a perfect Arcadian vision with the meadows going down to the lake, swans on the lake, cattle and sheep in the grounds, and this vast pair of Doric temples that are a house, but actually look like Arcadian temples – for the opera it couldn't be better.

It is such a strong landscape that the less one does the better. It just needs to be grass, animals and water, and people tumbling out of the opera enjoying the evening light. Just to be able to counterpoise the performance with silence is very important. You can come out and allow the music to carry on in your head. I think it would be great if people chose after a performance to stay for an hour or so in that midsummer setting, rather than just rushing for the taxi or the train.

There's a project I've worked on at Boughton near Kettering, where we've created a huge inverted pyramid. It is 50 metres square at the top, and goes seven metres down under ground with a pool of water at the bottom. Working with sound outside is really exciting. If you get the slopes right it can be extraordinarily clear, and especially if you're bouncing it off water – you can get a very pure sound, which indoors is much more difficult because of the way it bounces about. I called it Orpheus, because you spiral down into the underworld. And as you descend – the path that takes you down is a quarter of a kilometer – gradually the wind drops and you become much more conscious of stiller air, and the sound changes too. G

The Grange Festival, Hampshire, opens on June 7

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